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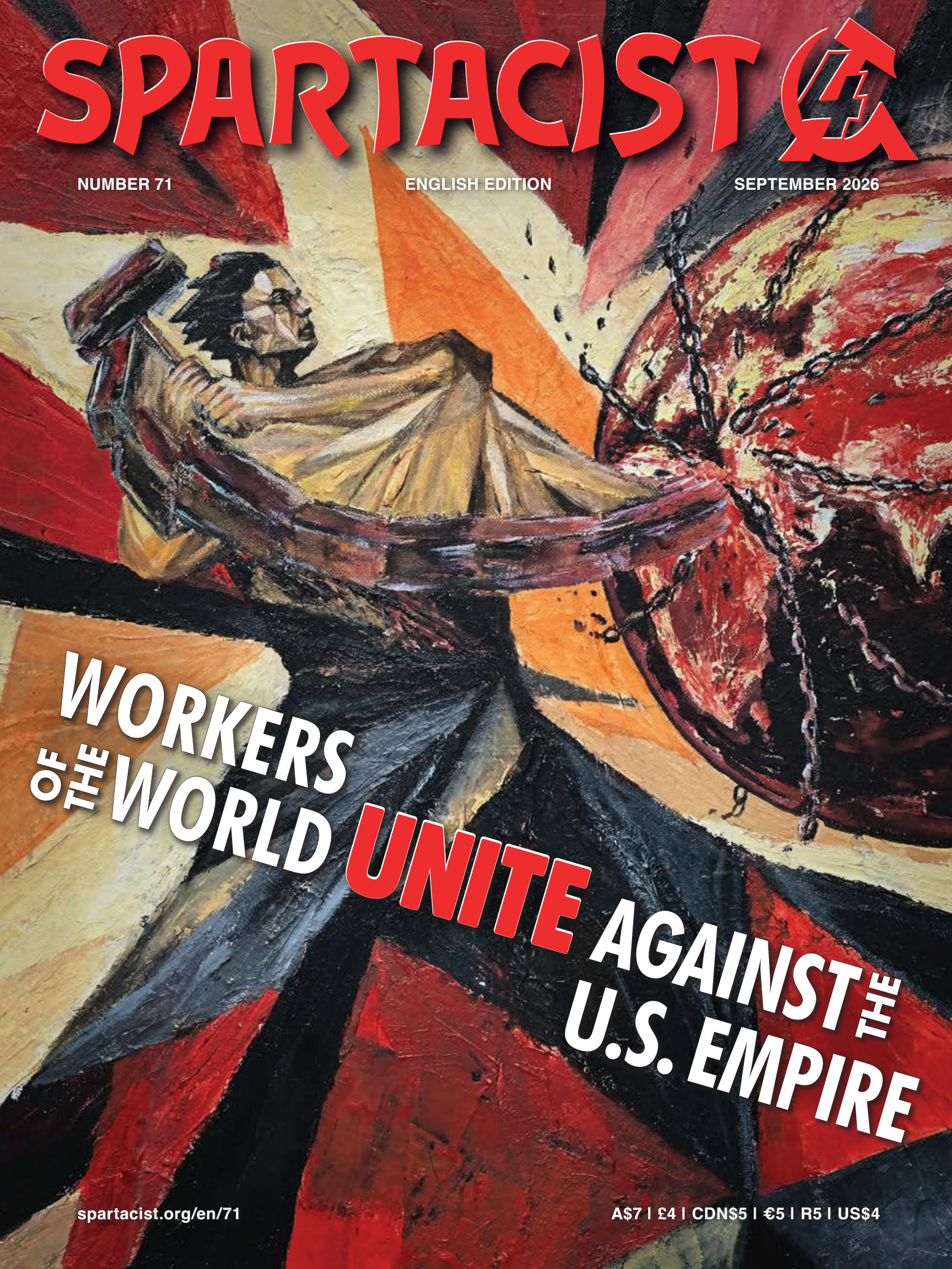

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE AGAINST THE U.S. EMPIRE

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Successful 9th International Conference of the ICL

In July, over 200 communists, delegates of the International Communist League (ICL) and invited guests, gathered in Mexico City to debate the tasks of the left amid the current reactionary imperialist offensive. Attendees came from every continent and included representatives from other communist organizations—the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR-CERCI), the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, the International Bolshevik Tendency, International Socialist Alternative (Revolutionary) (ISA-R) and the U.S.-based Labor Militant, as well as a delegation from the Australian-based Communist Unity. The defining political question of the conference was how to rebuild the revolutionary left in the current world context and overcome its fragmentation across unclear political lines.

On the eve of the official proceedings, we held two international gatherings, one of worker communists and the other of revolutionary youth. Both gatherings were geared toward discussing our interventions in these important areas of work and how to build a revolutionary trend within the youth and workers movements (see pages 10-11).

The conference itself began with fraternal greetings (see page 8) followed by a discussion on the world situation. Our international conference document, "Workers of the World,

continued on page 25

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Number 71 September 2026

How to Rebuild the Communist Left

BY G. PERRAULT

The following presentation was given at the ICL's Ninth International Conference.

We all know great shocks are coming. We also know that the workers movement, starting with its communist vanguard, is thoroughly unprepared for them. For decades the left has accommodated itself to liberal bourgeois democracy, forgetting the basic principles of the class struggle and positioning itself for a rude awakening.

There is, however, another side to the question. Trotsky once wrote:

> "Every profound crisis—whether economic, political, or military—has its positive side, in that it puts to a test all the various traditional values and formulas, laying bare the rottenness of those that served to mask 'peacetime' contradictions, and thereby spurring forward the general development."
>
> —"A Fresh Lesson" (October 1938)

Dmitri Moor

We are already seeing this process unfold before our eyes. The increasing violence of world events is exposing the rot in the workers movement and anti-imperialist forces. From the collapse of the Bolivarian regime to the teetering Cuban Revolution, the hollowed-out trade-union movement, all the way to the impotent and fractured communist left.

The ICL is a tiny organization within the spectrum of Trotskyism—itself quite weak. What role can the tiny forces of the ICL seek to play in this context? This is one of the key questions we face at this conference. How can we, in the midst of global turmoil and a left in crisis, play our part in "spurring forward the general development" of our movement?

The objective course of events will bring great revolutionary upheavals. There can be no doubt about this. Our job is to make sure that when these great waves come crashing down, the communist movement isn't stuck in a tangled mess of its own making. Instead, it must be in a position to vie for leadership.

This task will be achieved by offering the working class a real political alternative, one which can break the false binary of capitalist politics. Drawing lessons from past failures, we must forge a revolutionary trend, extend it internationally and root it deeply in the proletariat and oppressed masses.

This is the task of the ICL. It is not the most glamorous, and there will be no quick success, but it is the only perspective that gives real meaning to our existence as an independent political force, that can arm us with the confidence to withstand the coming shocks and prepare us to seize the opportunities they will create.

The Crisis of the Revolutionary Left

Trotsky explained how "thoughts are scientific if they correspond to an objective process and make it possible to influence that process and guide it" (*History of the Russian Revolution* [1930]). To influence the course of the Marxist left, we must understand the source of its crisis. What are the objective factors which explain the current weakness of our movement? At first sight, the answer seems obvious: the left is divided because people disagree. But that only pushes the question back. Why do these disagreements arise, and why do they persist generation after generation?

The first thing to understand is that the myriad ideological differences which divide the left are not just ideas floating in the air. They reflect real class polarizations—often in a very deformed way. It is important to understand this point: disputes in the left reflect in embryonic form the great class and social conflicts of a given epoch.

And if internationalist Marxist principles lay the basis

for uniting the working class behind its historic interests, the conciliation of bourgeois interests drives it apart. Fundamentally, the conciliation of non-proletarian interests explains why the Marxist left is hopelessly splintered.

A party that conciliates nationalism will drive away workers from other nationalities. A party that refuses to fight against the discrimination faced by certain minorities will be shunned by the most oppressed. A party that conciliates liberal feminism will splinter along moralistic lines. And on and on it goes, with capitulations in one direction generally followed by mistakes in the opposite direction, leading to an endless cycle of splits and fractures.

What makes this reality more difficult to understand is that the mistakes of the past have been compounded often for generations in the various Marxist trends. The divisions between Trotskyists, Stalinists, Maoists, even Hoxhaists, all reflect past clashes of interests and programs. But the more distant we are from the events which prompted these divisions, the more they lose their meaning.

The clearest evidence of this is that all the different Marxist currents are polarized along similar lines: the Ukraine war, imperialism, the national question, identity politics. None of the different distinct Marxist traditions can present a unified answer to the main questions of the epoch. The point is not that the disputes of the past do not matter—we will certainly continue to defend the Trotskyist tradition—but that the existing chapels of Marxism are anachronisms which mask rather than clarify the key class questions that our movement faces today.

How Other Tendencies Get Revolutionary Leadership Wrong

Before moving on to how we can start laying the foundations to solve this mess, I want to say a few words about some of the other explanations which exist for the crisis of revolutionary leadership. There are generally two mirror-mistakes made. The first reduces revolutionary leadership to objective events; the second reduces it to correct ideas abstracted from practice.

Expressions of this first trend can be found in parties such as Lutte Ouvrière, or our own party in the past. Obviously, the balance of class forces, the level of class struggle and the consciousness in the working class are crucial in determining the influence that revolutionaries can acquire. But to insist on the objective at the expense of all else reduces revolutionaries to waiting for a different period. The result is passivity and fatalism.

In the second idealist trend, the Partyists have their own distinctive argument. They think that if Marxist groups could agree on a common minimum program and maintain a democratic culture, then all the various groups could start uniting. As I already explained, conflicting political trends reflect conflicting class or sectoral interests. Unification can only happen by overcoming these conflicts, not by sweeping them under the rug behind abstract principles and formulas.

Most other parties are just as idealist, but unlike the Partyists, they tend to deny the crisis among communists. Groups like the Revolutionary Communist International, but really almost every tendency, consider themselves to be the only example of the unbroken thread of Marxism. For these parties the crisis of revolutionary leadership can be reduced to the weakness of their own forces. Naturally they become overwhelmingly obsessed with the number of people they recruit. Instead of treating Marxism as a tool to advance the class struggle, they reduce the class struggle to an arena for winning people over to the "correct" set of Marxist ideas.

Marxism, from the analysis of objective reality, elaborates ideas which can themselves be applied to change this reality. So, it is obviously antithetical to Marxism to explain the crisis of the revolutionary movement either by ideas abstracted from reality or by blaming objective reality without a program to change it.

Untying Political Knots

Now that we are clear that divisions in the workers movement are a refraction of existing social divisions and that we have dispelled certain wrong notions about revolutionary leadership we can finally start working toward solutions.

First, we must look at how we can overcome the infernal cycle of bad splits and polarizations within the left. The answer to this question is again basic: to break with all forms of bourgeois ideology. Now, don't dismiss me just yet. I know it is a caricature for small groups to proclaim that they uniquely in the world have once and for all broken with reformism. This is not where I'm going.

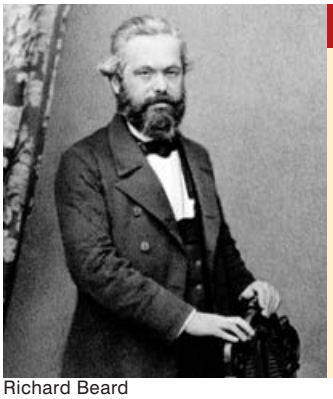
Abstractly proclaiming one's rupture with bourgeois ideology is meaningless. The ICL makes no such claim. Instead, we try to put forward a method which can overcome reactionary bourgeois polarizations.

As a rule, every political conflict presents the working class with two bourgeois alternatives. Whether the issue is a war, a strike or a thorny social question, revolutionaries must develop an independent proletarian solution capable of going beyond this false choice. Our starting point must always be to fight for the triumph of a working-class alternative against all those on offer. The moment this is lost sight of, and our goal becomes merely to influence existing forces, we can no longer speak of being an independent proletarian factor.

This being said, it would be a vulgar mistake to paint all disputes involving bourgeois programs as equally reactionary. The working class must often take a side in such con-

flicts. In the war against Iran, as in all wars of imperialist aggression, the only way to unite the working class is based on defending the oppressed nation, in this case Iran. The position we take in any conflict must always be guided by what advances the interests of the proletariat as a whole, and not one sector of the class at the expense of another.

Many Marxists stop here; they take a side while proclaiming their political independence and raise revolutionary demands. But revolutionary leadership requires more than taking the correct side. It is essential to also seek to overcome the limitations imposed by bourgeois leaderships on progressive causes. Take the struggle for trans liberation, for example. It is certainly necessary to take a side against TERFs. But to offer the movement any prospect of advancing amidst the huge wave of reaction it faces, we must wage a determined struggle against the liberal ideology which dominates the movement. The point is not to recite platitudes about eliminating gender division under communism—although we are for this—but to concretely show how Marxism is an essential tool to advance the struggle of trans people.



Richard Beard

> The philosophers have only **interpreted** the world in various ways; the point, however, is to **change** it.
>
> —Karl Marx, "Theses On Feuerbach" (1845)

Elaborating a strategy which can effectively challenge existing leaderships is where the difficulty truly lies. To impose a class solution, one must look at the contradictions in each side of a conflict and untangle the reactionary interests of the bourgeoisie from the legitimate social aspirations of the masses. This may sound straightforward in the abstract. In reality, it is often the hardest part of revolutionary politics.

In the Russia-Ukraine war, both sides fight for reactionary aims. Yet both also draw on legitimate grievances. The Russians have faced decades of Western aggression, and Russian minorities in Ukraine were oppressed by the post-Maidan regime. Ukraine, for its part, is justified in fighting for its national existence against Russian aggression. To overcome the reactionary polarization between Russian and Ukrainian workers, it is necessary to lean into the progressive side of their respective aspirations and show how achieving these aims cannot be done through the bourgeoisie's strategy. For Ukraine, Western alignment together with attempts to reconquer Russian-majority territories undermines the national survival of the country. In the case of Russia, oppressing Ukrainians will set back the struggle against Western imperialism by permanently inflaming national antagonisms.

This basic method is essential for the working class to advance its own class interests and no longer be forced to choose among bad alternatives. But it is no guarantee. Life is always more complicated than theory. Nevertheless, what is certain is that without consciously trying to offer working-class solutions to social polarizations, there can be no talk of revolutionary leadership, and no talk of overcoming the divisions in the Marxist left.

The Dynamic of World Events

I have made a case for the ICL's basic methodology and how it can help overcome many of the conflicts on the left. However, as we all know it is not enough to have the right ideas; these ideas need to be adopted. Given our size, it is fair to ask how we can ever expect to have a decisive influence on the rest of the Marxist left, much less the class struggle. To answer, it is necessary to view our tasks beyond the bounds of our own little organization and place the political trend we represent against the backdrop of great world events.

At bottom, our confidence does not rest on the abilities of our members, our size or our resources. It rests on the dynamics of the class struggle itself. Our political perspective points the way toward resolving the central political contradiction of the present epoch. On the one hand, the

PUT PUTIN IN THE BIN
UKRAINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN
VICTORY TO UKRAINE
ARM UKRAINE TO DEFEAT RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM!
EXCLUSIVE
EFF
ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA
S. AFRICAN MP: PUTIN'S FIGHT TO DEFEND TERRITORY, SOVEREIGNITY IS JUSTIFIABLE
NAIROBI 15:26
100K NATO TROOPS TO BE SENT UNDER DISGUISE OF 'PEACEKEEPERS'

Bjanka Kadic RT

From pro-imperialist cheerleaders for Ukraine to "anti-imperialist" cheerleaders for Russia, divisions on the left reflect real social conflicts.

U.S. empire is bringing the world down in a cycle of barbarism to defend its hegemony, and on the other, there is the absence of a force which is willing and able to bring it to a progressive end.

Events themselves will show both the burning need to defeat the U.S. empire and the inadequacy of the non-revolutionary solutions on offer. The objective situation itself will demand an independent working-class alternative to this growing contradiction. This is why, although our trend barely exists in terms of the forces it represents, we can be confident in its political potential.

> **The Bolsheviks are a tiny minority in the Soviet, and Lenin dreams of seizing the power; isn't that pure adventurism? There was not a shadow of adventurism in Lenin's statement of the problem.... "We are not charlatans"—he throws this in the eyes of future objections and accusations—"we must base ourselves only upon the consciousness of the masses. Even if it is necessary to remain in a minority—so be it....**
>
> **"We do not want the masses to believe us just on our say so; we are not charlatans. We want the masses to be freed by experience from their mistakes." Don't be afraid to remain in the minority! Not for ever, but for a time. The hour of Bolshevism will strike. "Our line will prove right.... All the oppressed will come to us, because the war will bring them to us. They have no other way out."**
>
> **—Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)**

We are not arguing that history will mechanically vindicate our program, as every Marxist tendency claims. Our confidence rests on something more concrete: our program addresses a contradiction that the objective course of events will continuously bring to the fore.

None of this should encourage complacency. If the experience of the Cold War teaches us anything, it is that objective pressures alone are not enough. Despite the need for a revolutionary solution to the polarization between the Stalinist world and imperialism, the Trotskyist movement fundamentally failed in its historic task. History presents opportunities. It does not seize them for us. This is where building a political instrument that can be the living vehicle of the revolutionary program takes its full importance.

From Perspective to Practice: Building the ICL

So far, I have been highlighting the broad political perspective which must animate our work. I have tried to show how the ICL can contribute toward overcoming the historical challenge facing our movement. This understanding is essential in giving meaning to our efforts and sacrifices in the difficult times we face. But from the broad we must come back down to the particular, and to how, with the forces currently at our disposal, we can advance our cause.

Before discussing what we should do, we need to be honest about where we are. In his 1936 article "Marxist Politics or Unprincipled Combinationism?" Max Shachtman speaks of the three stages of the evolution of a revolutionary organization:

> "A propaganda group which concentrates on hardening the initial cadres on the basis of clearly defined principles; then a more active group in the process of transition to a mass movement...; finally, the larger movement, which not only calls itself a party but which can discharge the responsibilities incumbent upon an organization claiming to defend the daily as well as the historical interests of the proletariat."

The ICL finds itself in a rather contradictory position. We are an old organization. But one which has seen dramatic renewal. In many ways we are still in the initial stages of our development. The bulk of our membership is composed of older comrades, who have dedicated their lives to building the party, and we are only starting to build a younger layer of leading cadre. At the same time, we have been making important interventions into a growing range of struggles, from defense campaigns, to strikes, to small united-front initiatives.

Overall, we are in a very delicate position. This conference illustrates very well how we are politically mature as an organization, but still organizationally embryonic. The tenuous nature of our forces makes the efforts of each one of our comrades all the more important. The loss of even a few comrades in certain critical areas could set us back in an important way. Meanwhile the current political turmoil in the left does present certain openings that could lead to a rapid transformation of our party. Our recent work has attracted a following which we previously did not have. But this has not yet materialized in important organizational gains.

To the comrades who agree with us on our fundamental perspectives, we need your help as members of the ICL. A revo-

Workers Hammer

Spartacist contingent at Palestine demonstration in London during Twelve-Day War, June 2025.

lutionary trend will not build itself; it needs an organized force which will make it a material force in the class struggle and an influence on the course of events.

Conclusion: What Does Revolutionary Regroupment Look Like?

I want to conclude this report with the question of revolutionary regroupment. The fractured nature of the Marxist left and the upcoming upheavals in the world are more and more bringing this question to the fore. Recognizing the need for revolutionary regroupment is one thing; understanding how it can actually happen is another.

Currently, the crisis in the Marxist left is not favorable to a broad regroupment of forces. If anything, we see a reinforced tendency toward fracture and sectarianism. But we can also see beginnings of a countertrend—individuals, groups and parties who are drawing lessons and looking for a way forward. There is potential for regroupment within this layer, but we need to be very clear about the scale here. For the time being, we are talking of a small minority.

LONG LIVE THE THIRD COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL!
VIVE LA TROISIÈME INTERNATIONALE COMMUNISTE!
EVVIVA IL TERZA INTERNAZIONALE COMMUNISTA!
ES LEBE DIE DRITTE KOMMUNISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE!
Sergey Ivanovich Ivanov

Founding of Comintern: the greatest revolutionary regroupment in history.

These initial small regroupments must be seen as steps to build a lever that can later produce much bigger realignments within our movement. If all of this sounds rather ambitious, then the obvious question becomes: where do we actually begin?

We've seen how the crisis of leadership is rooted in the absence of a firm proletarian foundation. It follows that there can be no solution to this problem without rooting a revolutionary trend within the working class itself. This is fundamentally what will give social power and political coherence to the Marxist left. Without this we are doomed to remain small intellectual circles playing with ideas. In this sense, our industrial work is important not only because of the immediate struggles we wage, or because it deepens our party's understanding of reality. It is essential because it is the only path to building a revolutionary trend rooted in the working-class vanguard. Breakthroughs in this area of work will not come easily, but they have the potential to fundamentally transform the character of our movement.

We've also seen how the crisis of imperialism will be the central factor driving forward a revolutionary trend. A true perspective of revolutionary regroupment is one which seeks to totally shift the center of gravity of the international left away from Western countries, turning to the millions bearing the brunt of the imperialist boot. The small but disproportionate resources available to the Marxists in the West must be leveraged to push the movement forward in the Global South.

Finally, when we think of revolutionary regroupment, we must look to the greatest example in history: the founding of the Third International. World War I and the Russian Revolution were of course the catalyst for the historic feat of regrouping revolutionaries on an unprecedented international scale, but it was prepared by long and patient struggle by the Russian Bolshevik Party.

Fortunately, we are not the first revolutionaries to confront a period like this. In *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin describes the first stage of this struggle in the years 1903-05, which he names the years of preparation for revolution. He explained how during this period:

> "Representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends—the liberal-bourgeois, the petty-bourgeois-democratic..., and the proletarian-revolutionary—anticipated and prepared the impending open class struggle by waging a most bitter struggle on issues of programme and tactics.… Those political and ideological trends which were genuinely of a class nature crystallised in the struggle of press organs, parties, factions and groups; the classes were forging the requisite political and ideological weapons for the impending battles."

This is the stage we find ourselves in today. Our task, like then, is to forge the political and ideological weapons for the battles coming our way.

If we are to have any hope of standing up to our historical task, we need to forge a political trend capable of meeting the great political challenges of our epoch—and we need a party to give it flesh and blood in the class struggle.

We cannot afford another generation of sterile and fragmented Marxists. There is no time to lose.■

Detail from Rodchenko graphic

Greetings to the ICL's Conference

We reprint below selections from the greetings delivered by other communist organizations to the ICL's Ninth International Conference.

International Socialist Alternative (Revolutionary)

Greetings,

First, I want to extend thanks to the ICL for inviting ISA-R to this conference. In many ways, it represents a qualitative step forward in our ongoing dialogue and joint work.

Formality aside, it is necessary to talk about the process that brought us to this point. It is no coincidence that the ICL's critical reorientation coincides with our struggle with the ISA's tradition.

A reexamination of Marxist theoretical work was part of both of our struggles, with the ICL's often inspiring and informing our own and vice-versa. But more importantly, the clashes with our long held understandings of Marxism and Leninism are brought forward by dynamics at the base of the world situation.

We come from totally opposite traditions. From two different sides of the split that destroyed the Fourth International after World War 2. One where prognostics "determined everything" to the detriment of program, and the other a school of "formula theorizing" as Dick Fraser put it.

We also have drawn totally different organizational practices. As we march towards revolutionary regroupment, the collision of these two traditions will have to produce something qualitatively new. This requires us to seriously and collectively examine the past and present of Bolshevik-Leninism in order to determine its future.

We have to be clear—we are only at the very beginning. We are still able to speak the same language of Trotskyism. This is not to be the case of the millions currently organized in the various Communist parties, social democracy, and the radical petit bourgeois parties of the global South. We have to learn to speak new languages and translate our revolutionism.

The neoliberal period has come to an end, and with it the illusions of a Pax Americana have gone up in smoke. For the past few decades the left of the imperial center, no matter how sectified, found itself stumbling behind the trends and traps of the neoliberal narrative.

We accommodated liberal pacifism, gave support to bourgeois "radicals," became artisanal NGOs, and, most importantly, we turned our backs on the working class—to which they responded by turning their backs on us. We became unserious, and irrelevant.

The world is unraveling itself, an American empire in decline is clawing back with greater aggression than before seen. Anyone who denies that US imperialism still represents the great bastion of reaction and parasitism is now proclaiming blindness.

The world faces two paths. One, where the collapse of US hegemony, which is inevitable, leads to an even deeper strangulation of the productive forces and a period of deep isolationism. The other is the road to world revolution and globalized socialist development.

Our subjective task is to build the leadership capable of steering our class and all humankind down the second path. Our first obstacle is our own fragmentation and subjective failure, beyond it lies a reforged party of world communism!

From Nigeria to the United States—communist greetings from ISA-R, long live the international working class!

POR—Comité de Enlace por la Reconstrucción de la IV Internacional

This global imperialist offensive also aims to destroy living and working conditions, freedoms and rights that have been won, and the political and labor organizations of the working class. The imperialists also apply these policies in their own countries. And they face resistance from the working class and the oppressed. We affirm, alongside the ICL, that the working class has never lacked the will to fight; what it lacks is a leadership capable of guiding it in the struggle for its historic interests.

We understand that in the semi-colonies, communists must apply the tactic of the anti-imperialist united front, under the leadership of the working class, raising the democratic and national banners betrayed by the bourgeoisie and its parties; this is the decisive tactic for contesting the leadership of the masses against nationalism, reformism, and all variants of the Popular Front in order to achieve national liberation. We must combat all sectarianism and opportunism as if they were a plague. Our agreement to defend Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba—including demanding Maduro's freedom—is important. The decisive question is to fight for leadership of the national liberation struggle in opposition to the national

bourgeoisie, which claims to represent the interests of the entire nation and uses nationalism to reinforce its authority.

Communist Unity

There is a new generation of revolutionary and socialist leadership, very slowly, emerging through the generational changing of the guard. A generation has come of age after the fall of the USSR, and in the midst of the failure of sectarianism. If we are to take advantage of this epochal shift and to pick our defeated movement off its feet, we must unite. The question of regroupment is no longer an abstract one, but an existing and serious debate. One in which the ICL is making its mark.

In Australia the six months of fusion with the comrades of the Spartacist Tendency (ST) have been nothing short of a major success.

International Bolshevik Tendency

This is the first time representatives of the IBT have ever attended official proceedings of the ICL. Our participation here has been made possible by the reorientation your tendency took at your last international conference in 2023.

We find ourselves in an ongoing dialogue that has to date seen discussions and debates between our groups in London, Johannesburg and Melbourne. Even when in sharp disagreement with you, we have found our exchanges to be politically stimulating. Some of the points you have made in the course of debate have generated fruitful internal discussion within the IBT, and we hope that our contributions have produced similar results within the ICL.

As you know, the IBT continues to support the program of the international Spartacist tendency as expressed up to the beginning of the 1980s. Since then, the politics of the Spartacist tendency and the ICL have taken an uneven path.

You are still in the process of carrying out a thorough revision of your historic program. Our view is that, in breaking with the sectarianism of what we have come to call the period of "middle Spartacism," you have identified real problems with your organization's application of its historic program, but that you have mistakenly understood those problems to be rooted in that program itself. You have, as we put it, thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

Labor Militant

We're very happy to be back in the same room as ISA-R after a messy split of Socialist Alternative that we were both a part of a couple of years ago.

Marxists are punching below our weight. We have to debate. We have to reassess our own traditions.

We're reassessing not only democratic centralism and the way that was practiced in Revolutionary Workers and Socialist Alternative, but their position on China, their position on collaborating with the Green Party.

This conference is an important step forward. I'm very happy to see everyone in the room today.

We need open debate. We also need to find the places where we agree, and not just theoretical agreement. As Lenin said, the truth is concrete—and the test of theory is in action.

We launched United Front for a Workers' Party to bring socialist organizations, unorganized socialists, and workers together to build unity in action, in concrete campaigns.

Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

I think it is no accident that this conference has two main issues to discuss, which is first the reassessment of the history of the Fourth International in a period 1945-53, and, second, the world situation today. What do these two periods have in common? They have in common that they were both turning points in world history.

And therefore these were also turning points in a history of a revolutionary organization. And it's clear that what was true at that time, eighty years ago, is also true today. Without a correct assessment, a correct analysis of the world situation today, it is impossible to elaborate and to fight for a revolutionary program.

Of course, there are a number of issues which are relevant to understand the world situation. And there are also a number of issues where we disagree. But in my opinion the single most important issue is the China question. This is essential to understand the dynamics of the world situation.

As obviously everyone here knows, the ICL considers China as a deformed workers state. We in RCIT consider it as a capitalist and imperialist state.

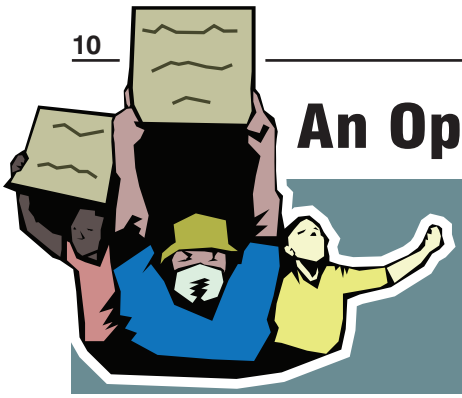
Clearly the decisive question is: what is the class character of the economy of China? And related to this, what is the class character of the state apparatus of China?

Socialista Philippines

Let this conference serve as a platform for collective analysis, mutual learning, and coordinated action. Together, let us build a stronger international labor movement capable of advancing the interests of workers and marginalized peoples across the world.

Our strength lies in our unity. Our hope lies in our collective action. Our future lies in our continued struggle for a just and humane society.

Read the full greetings at:
spartacist.org/en/71/greetings



An Open Call from the Spartacus Youth:

For an International Revolutionary YOUTH MOVEMENT!

> "Youth must of necessity advance to socialism *in a different way, by other paths, in other forms, in other circumstances* than their fathers."
> —Lenin, "The Youth International" (December 1916)

Today, we find ourselves halfway between an old order that is dying and a new, more brutal one emerging. While this shift impacts all of society, its consequences are most concentrated for young people, who are seeing their future being stripped away.

As attacks on youth intensify and they find themselves increasingly on the frontlines of social decay, there is no shortage of anger and raw energy among them, like the Gen Z uprisings. But the question is: ***where will it go?*** In fighting against their degrading situation and oppression, youth have the potential to become a new generation of revolutionary leaders. Yet as they become politically active, there is no movement that can direct their energy toward the true source of their problems in a progressive way. What does exist, however, are various forces that divert youth ***away*** from a struggle against the root of their oppression. As a result, no unified movement for youth liberation currently exists. To address this problem, the Spartacus Youth propose three essential points to build the struggle of youth today.

1. Fight U.S. Imperialism!

As our conference document motivates, the battle against U.S. imperialism is central because it is the main agent dragging the world down a spiral of misery and war. Young people are the first on the chopping block. Giving youth a future is inseparable from the broader struggle against U.S. imperialism. Yet, the left has been overwhelmingly unable to break with and fight against the U.S.-led system. This is what holds back our movement today. We must change course.

2. To Beat the Right, Ditch the Liberals!

The forces of right-wing populism exploit young people's legitimate anger at their situation and society to promote adaptation to a reactionary system. Right populists will prop up the capitalist system on the backs of the working class at home and around the world. We need a ***united*** struggle against Wall Street and its puppets. Such a struggle cannot be waged if youth take the racist, anti-immigrant, transphobic bait of the class enemy.

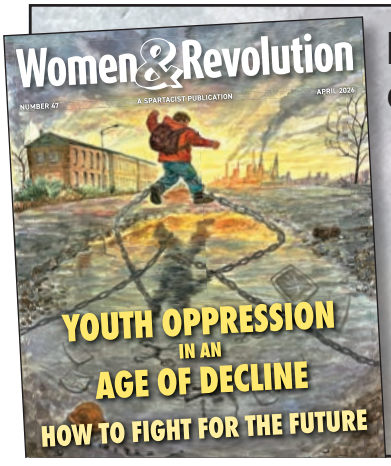
In reaction to the strength of the right, many look to the "unity" of all "progressives" against it, i.e., a popular front. This won't stop the rise of reaction. Rather, an alliance with those responsible for social decay guarantees the victory of reaction. Liberalism was always about allowing the ruling class to pursue its interests under the guise of being "progressive." First, the Establishment leveraged the suffering of immigrants, black people, women, and trans people. Now that same Establishment is abandoning them to the right-wing backlash ***it*** fostered. Rather than making moral appeals to the Establishment, revolutionary youth must fight unflinchingly in defense of the most oppressed and link this fight to the working class.

3. Fight Together with the Working Class!

Social decay falls heavily on the shoulders of young people: the lack of jobs and housing, declining state of education, and militarization all make youth more insecure. To alleviate the growing burden on young people, significant resources will have to be torn from the hands of the capitalist ruling class. This is the basis for unity between youth and the workers against the capitalists.

Socialist youth must also join the ranks of the workers movement and fight within it for a revolutionary strategy. Only the working class has the power to fight and defeat the American Empire in a way that advances the struggles of the oppressed overall. To win a future for youth, we must link our movement to the working class and in turn bring our energy and determination to the side of the proletariat.

Join the SYC! ■



Issue on youth oppression

Also:
- Sex
- Misogyny
- Trans
- MAGA
- Imperialism
- Industry

iclfi.org/wr/47

COMMUNIST WORKERS IN A REACTIONARY EPOCH

The following is an excerpted presentation given by comrade Tom C. at an international gathering of the ICL's working-class friends and supporters.

Welcome, comrades. It's unusual and important to have a gathering of communist workers from different continents and nations. It gives us the opportunity to discuss our tasks within the working class and the unions, not just in the lofty terms of our final revolutionary goal, but in concrete ways of getting us closer to that goal. Today, we want to take a serious look at the current conditions of the working class, our own aims and tactics, what challenges we face and how to take meaningful steps forward.

We know from direct experience that there's been a dramatic rightward shift in the world, not just in bourgeois politics but in the mood and mindset of many workers. In the midst of this, we need to understand what's going on and why. Equally important, we as communist workers need to know where we stand and what we can realistically do right now, individually and collectively, on the job and in the unions. We must not only survive in industry, but also gain political authority and build support for our revolutionary program. We want to bring the most advanced workers into our orbit, to build a fighting workers movement and a revolutionary party. Our goals are huge, but our forces are tiny. Our coworkers are often unresponsive, wary or even hostile to our ideas. Obviously, this can be a source of demoralization and despair, and we need to consciously address that.

That's what James P. Cannon was doing in 1932. He was worried about the vanguard getting exhausted and demoralized and then perhaps being unable to handle the real movement when it breaks out. In a similarly grim period, he offered this advice:

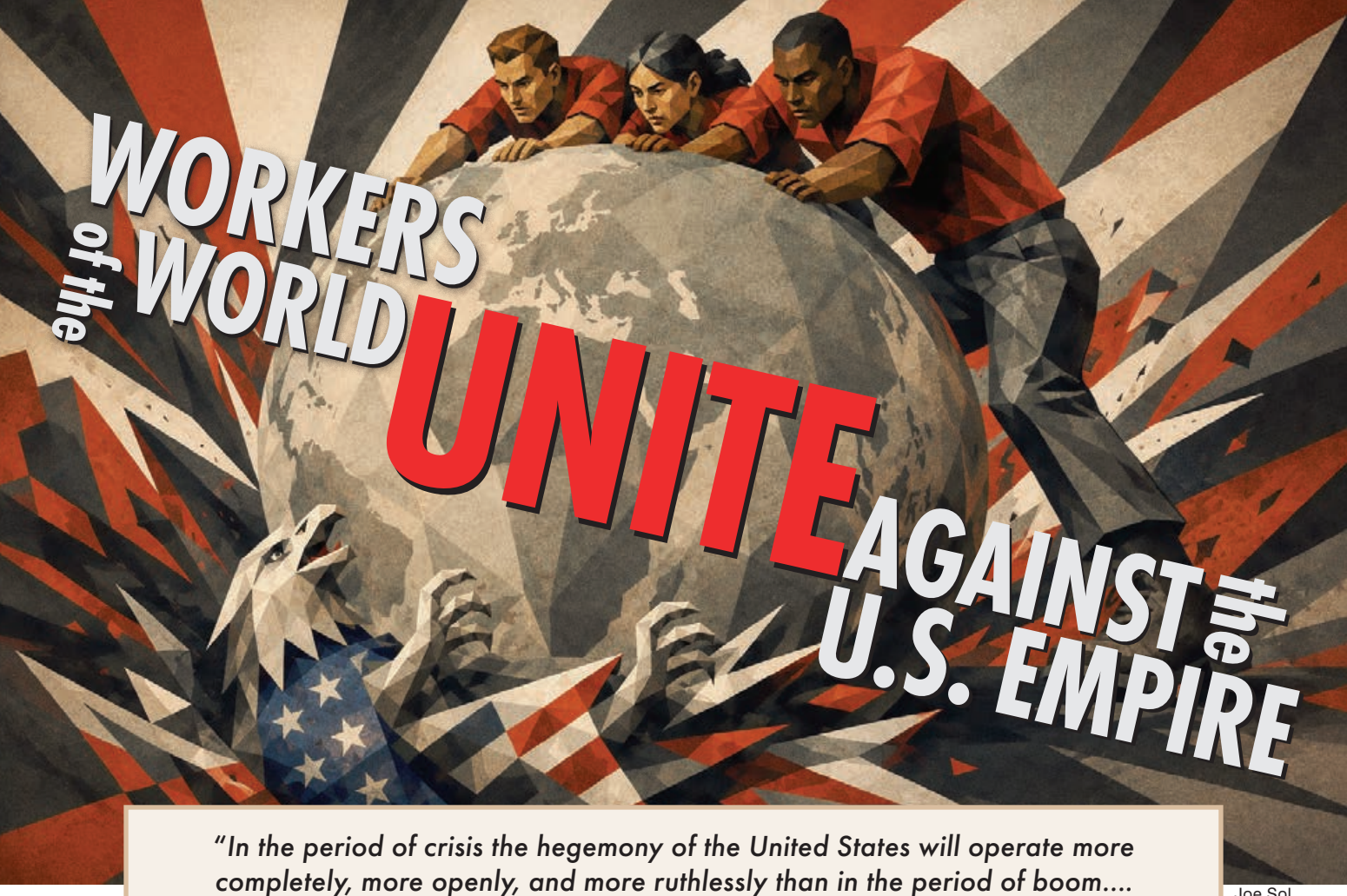
> "The Communist workers are not the working class. They are only its conscious section, and at present in America they are a small and numerically insignificant section. The Communist workers alone cannot fight real class battles. Their function is to fight with the workers and in their front ranks. The task of the Communists at the moment is to prepare the workers for the coming struggles. The center of this task is the 'patient work of explanation'; of agitation and propaganda to win the workers over to a course of struggle. There is no substitute for this prosaic task and there is no way to leap over it."
>
> —James P. Cannon, "The Threat of Illegality," *Militant* (19 March 1932)

The patient work, that's what Trotskyist workers did. They did it where they found themselves working, often not by choice but by necessity, in a funny little industry (coal delivery yards) and in a city very hostile to unions (Minneapolis). When talking to their coworkers after the Great Depression began, they must have used one simple but essential phrase countless times: "Hey, let's keep in touch." Then, they did keep in touch, offering Marxist political analysis, a program and practical advice.

They became the real leadership for something rare but coveted: an actual fighting union. And when conditions were ripe, they seized their opportunity. The 1934 strikes they led were part of the great wave of class struggle that led to the formation of industrial unions in the U.S. We're nowhere near that point right now, but the historical tide will turn again, and we want to be ready just like the Minneapolis Trotskyists were. Things may be terrible right now, but things change. When they do, the workers you cultivated by once saying "hey, let's keep in touch" just might be your most militant coworkers or hopefully comrades.

Despite the bad period, what we do is important and it is remembered by our coworkers. One of the things that keeps me going is remembering times when I saw the enormous pent-up militancy and creative energy of my transit brothers and sisters unleashed, some of whom I thought beforehand were hopelessly self-centered and backward. I've seen black, white, Latino and Asian coworkers furious at the bosses and union tops alike, ready to walk off the job if only the union gave them ***a hint*** that it would back them up. And when that hint came, I've seen them walk out and man picket lines in the freezing cold in the thousands.

Let me end with an observation from the recent SL/U.S. conference motion: "Everything we do now matters, irrespective of the immediate response. By establishing a track record in today's struggles, we will attract vanguard elements as we become more widely known. It's on the basis of this work that we can aspire to build a revolutionary current within the working class itself when the objective situation changes."■



Joe Sol

"In the period of crisis the hegemony of the United States will operate more completely, more openly, and more ruthlessly than in the period of boom....

"A major crisis in the United States will strike the tocsin for new wars and revolutions. We repeat: there will be no lack of revolutionary situations. The entire question hinges upon the international party of the proletariat, the maturity and fighting ability of the Comintern, and the correctness of its strategical position and tactical methods."

—Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (1928)

We print below the conference document, drafted by comrade Mansa Kaur and adopted by the ICL's Ninth International Conference.

INTRODUCTION

The international situation is characterized by an untenable contradiction. On the one hand, U.S. imperialism is on a brutal offensive to reassert its hegemony on the world stage. To do this, it is ready to plunge all of humanity into a spiral of crises and wars. On the other hand, the working class—the only force which can offer a progressive alternative to the U.S. empire—has not yet entered the stage decisively under its own banner.

The working class has never lacked the will to fight; it lacks a leadership which can lead the struggles for its historical interests. For decades, organizations claiming the banner of Marxism have failed to provide such a leadership. This vacuum has allowed the forces of reaction to grow. Today, the communist movement is hopelessly fractured and stands isolated from those it claims to represent. The objective situation will not resolve this crisis, nor will conjunctural successes. To start the work of reconstruction and to regroup revolutionaries around the world, a program is needed—one which corresponds to the tasks of the epoch.

It is with this understanding that the Ninth International Conference of the ICL puts forward the following analysis and program. It is built on a critical analysis of the Marxist left during the post-Soviet period, as well as on our own modest but determined experience in the class struggle over the past three years of global turmoil.

PART I: THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

"…what is most important, that which constitutes the very gist, the living soul, of Marxism—a concrete analysis of a concrete situation."

—Lenin, *Kommunismus* (12 June 1920)

U.S. and China

The defining feature of our epoch is the antagonism between U.S. imperialism and China. Since 1945, the U.S.

Nathan Burke/Planet Pix

Cynthia Lee/Alamy

has been the dominant imperialist power and the guarantor of the world capitalist system. But for decades its economic base has been in relative decline. This was accelerated by post-Soviet globalization, the main beneficiary of which was China. This basic picture is widely agreed upon. However, the concrete dynamics and contradictions of this conflict are widely misunderstood in favor of impressionism and empiricism. It is necessary to understand the historical development of this relationship in order to understand the dynamics of the international situation today.

On the level of production, globalization led to the hollowing out of the industrial base of the imperialist bloc in favor of China and other countries of the Global South. The global manufacturing share of G7 countries declined by nearly half, falling from around 60% in 1995 to around 30% by 2020. The U.S. share of this figure dropped from 21% in 1995 to 17% in 2022. During the same period, China's share of global industrial output increased from 6% to 32%. This represents a truly seismic change in the balance of forces in this decisive arena, critical for large-scale war.

However, China's industrial and commercial weight far outweighs its financial and institutional role in the world economy, which remains firmly dominated by the U.S. and its allies. The institutions governing the international economy and relations remain those established by the U.S., namely the IMF, World Bank, WTO and the United Nations. While the dominance of the U.S. dollar has diminished, it remains the world's reserve currency, affording the U.S. "exorbitant privileges." Wall Street remains the center of international finance. The U.S. share of global market capitalization has remained at 45–50% in recent decades, whereas China's share has risen from virtually zero in 1980 to around 10–12% in 2025. And while China accounts for roughly 15% of global trade, the renminbi is used to invoice only around 2% of global trade.

Many argue that the exceptional growth in China's economic, commercial and military power means it is actively striving to supplant the U.S. on the world stage. This could not be further from the truth. Fundamentally China plays a conservative role and is not doing anything to decisively bridge the massive gap between its economic strength and its institutional and financial weakness—an anomaly for an emerging power.

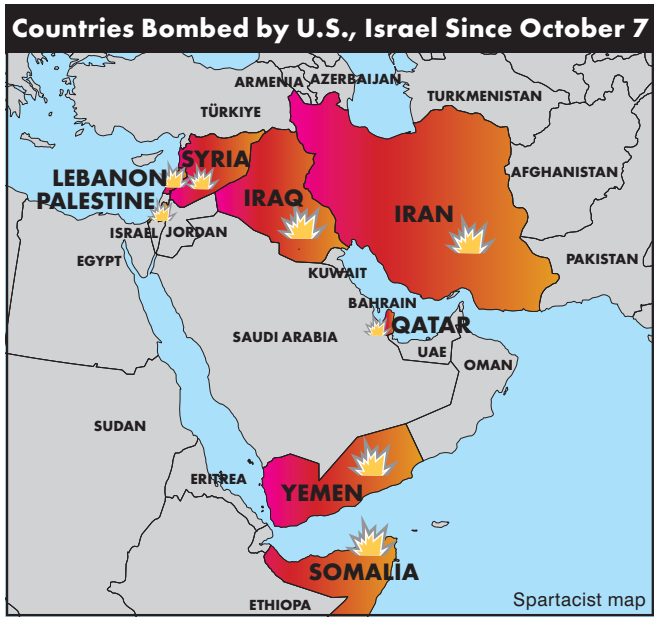
This picture is reflected in the military dynamics between the two great powers. The U.S. continues to have military preponderance, with 750 bases globally. And while China now has the second-largest military by expenditure, it is geared toward protecting its own borders, not replacing the global domination of the U.S. Its sole military base abroad is in Djibouti. While the U.S. has no qualms about using its military force, imposing its will on one country after another, China has not waged war since 1979. Faced with tariff assaults, it did not utilize its choke hold on rare earth minerals to cripple the U.S. military-industrial complex. It has done almost nothing to defend its partners when they have come under attack by the U.S.—Venezuela, Iran and Cuba being the main examples. In the realm of foreign policy, China prefers appealing to international law and "win-win" cooperation rather than wielding the considerable hard power at its disposal.

Fundamentally, China is not acting to establish its own hegemony, but seeks to reform the current order to improve its own standing and gain a degree of autonomy. It is of decisive importance to understand why this is the case. Where imperialism is by its very logic impelled toward expansion and conquest, China is not driven by the same laws. The state structure and social development of the People's Republic of China (PRC) remain rooted in the 1949 Revolution. This does not mean China's foreign policy is benevolent or guided by internationalism; far from it. But the social foundations of its state mean that its growth does not necessarily lead to the drive to subjugate other nations. It is because of this that there is simply no exclusive Chinese zone of influence imposing itself ***at the expense*** of the U.S. empire.

The primary contradiction at the heart of the world system is reduced to the following dynamic: U.S. hegemony is being undermined by the rise of China, but the Communist Party of China (CPC) is not trying to upend the U.S.-led order. Given the decay of industry and the parasitic role played by finance capital, the U.S. economy simply cannot outcompete China through conventional means. To stay on top, it must resort to ever more aggression and force to bring down the rest of the world. We are thus confronting a historically unprecedented situation where the emerging power is struggling to preserve the status quo while the declining power is tearing it up, trying to forge a new, reactionary realignment in world relations, squeezing ally and foe alike to achieve this aim.

The Impotent Allies

Within this emerging dynamic, Europe finds itself caught in a growing contradiction. The weakening of U.S. hegemony raises the need for the European powers to have greater strategic autonomy. Yet despite growing tensions,

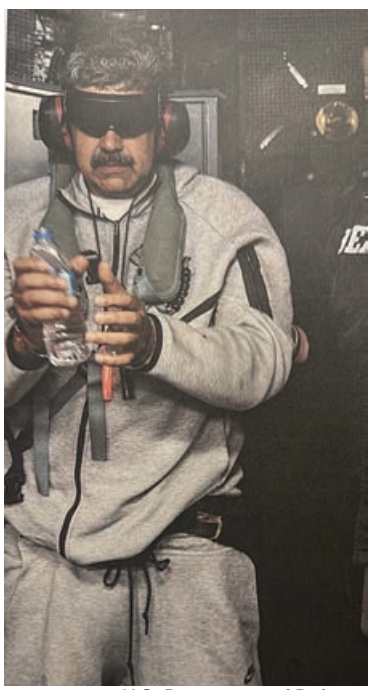


the European Union (EU) has not broken from the U.S. but is falling in line with its diktats, committing ever-greater resources to propping up the U.S. empire. First, this is explained by the fact that the entire foundation of modern Europe was built under the umbrella of U.S. military power, from its construction after World War II to its expansion following the collapse of the USSR. This is embodied in NATO. Without the U.S. as a unifying force, the EU would disintegrate into its component parts.

Second, due to their own relative decline, the imperialist countries of the EU have become ever more dependent on the U.S. to defend their privileged position on the world stage. Despite their best wishes, and multiple empty declarations to the contrary, they do not currently have the ability to project their power independently. Thus, rather than emerging as an independent pole, Europe is increasingly following the reactionary course being laid down by Washington, destroying its own economic and political stability in the process. The same dynamic explains the trajectory of Japan and junior imperialist powers such as Canada and Australia.

Russia, the Immovable Object

Russia stands out as an important force resisting the U.S. Although it has sufficient military power to obstruct U.S. ambitions, it lacks the economic and social weight necessary to establish a rival global order. The war in Ukraine, which Russia is likely to win, demonstrates its ability to resist and push back against NATO expansion on its western border. However, these efforts have come at a considerable cost. Further, its attempts at international adventures, whether in Syria or Africa, have not been successful and have not significantly increased its international influence. Russia's overall role is less as an alternative pole to U.S. domination and more as a brake on it: accelerating the crisis of the existing order without being able to replace it.


U.S. Department of Defense
Venezuelan president Maduro kidnapped by U.S.

The Spiral of Reaction in West Asia

Since October 7, Israel has engaged in an escalating cycle of carnage, assisted at every step by the U.S. This dynamic is not primarily due to October 7 itself, but to the relative weakening of the Israel-U.S. position in the region, mainly in favor of Iran. As a nationalist project rooted in the oppression and genocide of the Palestinians, Zionism cannot tolerate any regional counterweight to its domination which could challenge its ability to oppress the Arab masses. As a result, the Zionist state has used increasingly aggressive methods to re-establish its supremacy in West Asia, destroying the entire social fabric of the region.

While the U.S. and Israel have succeeded in inflicting tactical and strategic defeats (e.g., Syria) on many of their adversaries, these have not resolved the underlying crisis of their regional position. Military superiority has not enabled them to establish a stable political order, and they have failed in their attempts to destroy the Islamic Republic. However, it remains to be seen what the longer-term consequences of the increased pressure will be for Iran. What is certain is that the U.S. and Israel will continue to wreak untold devastation on the region until they are decisively defeated.

Latin America in the Crosshairs

The rise of China provided many Latin American countries with greater economic and diplomatic room for maneuver, weakening the near-monopoly once exercised by U.S. imperialism. Yet the region remains deeply integrated into the political, military and financial structures of U.S. domination. As U.S. hegemony comes under increasing pressure globally, Washington is attempting to reassert its authority within what it continues to regard as its exclusive sphere of influence. It is doing so by leveraging both its decisive military advantage and its influence over key sections of the region's ruling elites. Because of these advantages, the U.S. has identified Latin America as the most favorable terrain on which to push back against China and secure reindustrialization.

This has already been reflected in a renewed alignment of several governments with Washington and in a more aggressive assertion of U.S. power, as seen in the kidnapping of Venezuelan president Maduro and the escalation of the blockade against Cuba. Thus, the relative autonomy won by sections of the continent, as well as China's economic interests, increasingly collide with the renewed determination of U.S. imperialism to restore its authority in the Western Hemisphere.

Africa Fragmenting

The African continent may not be the focal point of great-power competition,

Unstable Stability in South Asia

None of the South Asian countries are able to play an independent role on the world stage, and they are completely at the mercy of changing global headwinds. The already weak economies of the region have been pummeled by U.S. tariff assaults and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. Pakistan is unable to use its role as mediator in the Iran war to alleviate its economic crisis. Meanwhile, New Delhi's fantasies of cashing in on non-alignment have shattered. It faces mounting pressure from Washington and is wary of Chinese influence among its neighbors. The overall result is a region under growing strain.

Yet geopolitically, South Asia is characterized by a stalemate. India and Pakistan are armed with nuclear weapons, while India dominates the region through its overwhelming demographic and economic weight. This dynamic produces a certain stability, but beneath it lies profound social instability: every country faces immense developmental needs and young populations demanding jobs that their governments are unable to provide. As pressures mount, these unresolved internal contradictions will continue to be the region's greatest source of turmoil.

but it is disproportionately affected by its consequences. At a time when economic development and continental integration are more necessary than ever, Africa is increasingly pulled toward fragmentation and conflict. The absence of strong national states means geopolitical shocks take a much greater toll on an already vulnerable social fabric. This opens a space for regional and global actors to exploit existing divisions. As the old imperialist powers compete with a rising China, as well as regional actors including Russia, Türkiye and the Gulf monarchies, local conflicts are becoming increasingly entangled with wider geopolitical rivalries. States such as Rwanda have also sought to advance their own strategic interests, intervening beyond their borders and deepening existing tensions. The various conflicts shaking the continent—in particular in Sudan, the Sahel and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—and the sharpening social antagonisms within individual countries point toward state fragmentation, heightened national and ethnic antagonisms, and the collapse of public authority and services.

Yet Africa's fragmenting is not new. Even the liberal period, which brought some economic growth to the continent, was plagued by bloody wars and genocides, from Rwanda to Congo to Darfur. While the liberal period saw a massive increase in imperialist aid through NGOs and international institutions, these have now been massively rolled back. In place of aid, the U.S. is dealing with the continent's crises with either disinterest, naked plundering or open hard power. Thus, the current fragmentation is characterized by an increase in scope and depth.

While the fractured state of the continent presents extreme dangers, its young, growing and hyper-exploited working class also holds immense revolutionary potential. The very contradictions which divide and weaken Africa make the need for a revolutionary overthrow of the neocolonial order and the unification of the continent on a new social basis all the more palpable and urgently posed.

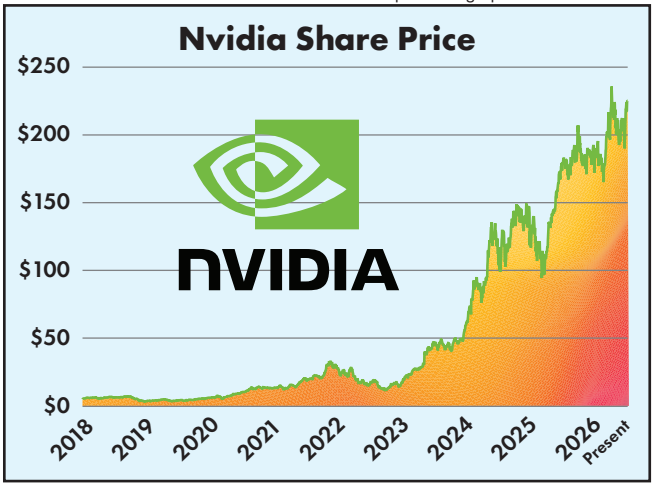
Southeast Asia Between the Anvil and the Hammer

Globalization integrated Southeast Asia into international supply chains as an intermediate link, dominated by foreign manufacturing giants, reliant on Chinese inputs and oriented to U.S. consumer markets. "With China on trade, with the U.S. on security" was the ASEAN catchphrase. Now, this means being caught between the anvil and the hammer. The U.S. is kicking the legs out from under the region's economies, hacking away at its supply chains with the aim of strangling China. In a warning of what's to come, Trump's tariff assaults and the war against Iran have already delivered devastating economic blows to a region where much of the population lives on the brink. By militarizing Southeast Asia and encouraging the aggressive expansion of Japanese forces across the region for the first time since WWII, the U.S. is raising the specter of war as it heightens its threat against China. Across Southeast Asia, the ground is being prepared for social explosions.

Global Economy on the Brink

Despite mounting geopolitical tensions, the basic structure of the world economy has remained remarkably resilient. But the very forces that have sustained this resilience—centrally the extraordinary performance of the U.S. stock market—are generating new contradictions that threaten to destabilize the entire system. Wall Street's gravity-defying rise has been driven by unprecedented levels of fiscal and monetary stimulus, massive capital expenditure by the major technology companies and the speculative frenzy both have engendered. While it is impossible to know exactly when this dynamic will come to an end, what is certain is that the eventual unwinding of the speculative boom centered on the technology sector will have profound consequences for the world situation. Already, China's deflationary pressures and excess industrial capacity are

Spartacist graph. Source: NASDAQ



being exported to the rest of the world—likely early signs of a global crisis of capitalist overproduction.

The bursting of the financial bubble will sweep away the mountains of fictitious capital which mask the true balance of international forces and expose the rot at the heart of the U.S. empire. Yet so long as the basic architecture of the world economy remains intact, the U.S. will retain enormous advantages in shaping both the response to the crisis and its outcome, enabling it to shift a significant share of the burden onto other countries.

In the first instance, we can expect the coming crisis to exacerbate all the existing dynamics and the intensification of capitalist attacks. But whether this results in a further descent into reaction or opens the road to revolutionary developments will depend above all on the response of the international proletariat. Here, the outcomes depend on the leadership and organization of the working class in each country. It is to this political question that we now turn.

PART II: THE DYNAMICS OF WORLD POLITICS

"A failure of correspondence between subjective and objective is, generally speaking, the fountain-source of the comic, as also the tragic, in both life and art. The sphere of politics less than any other is exempted from the action of this law. People and parties are heroic or comic not in themselves but in their relation to circumstances."

—Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)

The Death of Liberalism and the Rise of Reaction

The political status quo of the post-Soviet period is shattered. The ideological tools appropriate for the post-Soviet era of U.S. hegemony no longer correspond to the needs of the imperialist powers today. When U.S. hegemony was uncontested, the U.S. could afford the luxury of liberal democracy at home and abroad, fund NGOs and proclaim itself the champion of human rights, free trade, multiculturalism, etc. This road is now exhausted. As its hegemony slips away, the U.S. must go on the offensive. It cannot do this through liberal values and institutions, which are now obstacles to its aims.

The death of liberalism does not mean that a new realignment in world politics has been sealed. The general trend unleashed by the offensive of U.S. imperialism is toward increasing instability, reaction and conflict. But we are not on a straight road to hell. There is a difference between the needs and aims of U.S. imperialism and its ability to meet and implement them. Already its offensive has provoked all manner of resistance. However, the various contenders and would-be challengers are laying bare their bankruptcy, allowing the U.S. to retain the initiative in shaping world politics even in its decline. As a result, the liberal world order is being brought down by an insurgent imperialist right wing, ***not*** through a proletarian upsurge or an anti-imperialist offensive.

The leaders of the Global South are coming under ever-greater pressure to resist the depredations of U.S. imperialism but, bound by their own class interests and fear of mobilizing the masses, they seek to accommodate and maneuver rather than confrontation. The Communist Party of China, presiding over the gains of the 1949 Revolution, is squandering the revolutionary energy and potential of the gigantic Chinese proletariat by clutching onto the remnants of globalization and the liberal world order. Most other leaders are focused on balancing between the various pressures, as opposed to unifying against the U.S. This is best exemplified by BRICS+, an alliance with no unifying strategic objectives and which amounts to less than the sum of its parts.

Christopher Furlong/Getty

Reactionaries flood Central London in "Unite the Kingdom" rally, September 2025.

As for the workers movement, in most cases its leaders are desperately trying to shore up the liberal status quo even as it is collapsing before their eyes. Those on the left who claim to want a radical rupture, or even a revolution, generally stand far from the genuine sentiments of the masses, satisfying themselves with abstractions disconnected from the concrete tasks of the epoch. The absence of an independent proletarian opposition to U.S. imperialism is the single most important factor shaping world developments, whether in the imperialist centers, the semicolonial world or the various movements of resistance. Until this changes, the erosion of U.S. hegemony will continue to proceed on reactionary terms, increasing the oppression of the masses rather than advancing their emancipation.

This is not to say that non-revolutionary forces cannot inflict setbacks on the U.S. But these will always remain partial. Forging a true proletarian leadership is the central problem of revolutionary strategy in the present epoch. It can only begin to be resolved through a realistic appraisal of political dynamics and by drawing clear lessons from the experience of contemporary struggles.

Populist Right Ascendant in the West

The populist right is emerging throughout the West as the main anti-status-quo force, from Trump and MAGA in the

U.S. to Reform in Britain to the AfD in Germany and Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Australia. It is gaining ground on the basis of a convergence between the needs of U.S. imperial strategy and a broad rejection of the liberal status quo among significant layers of the population. As a result, it is increasingly able to channel working-class anger and resentment into a reactionary political agenda. The clearest sign of this rightward shift is that the political center of yesterday is itself adopting elements of the right: in Britain, the Labour Party has turned on immigration and, in the U.S., the Democrats have abandoned their earlier pretense of defending black and trans rights.

Pink Tide Crashes in Latin America

The growing wave of right-wing governments in Latin America is driven by a similar rejection of the status quo of the last decades on the continent. Left populist governments which rode to power on the back of a wave of anti-imperialist sentiment in the 2000s are today falling like flies. While these governments enacted many progressive reforms, they also restrained the revolutionary energy of the masses, ultimately leading to retreats and betrayals. Now, it is the right populist and pro-imperialist forces who are riding on their failure to deliver lasting improvement, not Marxist challengers armed with the lessons of the Pink Tide.

The Bolivarian regime in Venezuela cracked at the first direct military blow by U.S. imperialism. How thoroughly rotten the regime had become has been shown by the absence of any significant mass upsurge against the kidnapping of President Maduro and by the fact that former Chavista Delcy Rodríguez is now collaborating with the U.S.

A similar trend is observable in Cuba, a beacon for the oppressed and anti-imperialists since 1959. The Cuban Revolution today hangs in the balance as Trump escalates the vicious U.S. blockade. Yet instead of an internationalist, revolutionary strategy to break the blockade, the Communist Party of Cuba is wagering everything on negotiations and has opened the doors to a capitalist takeover of the economy. This can only embolden the U.S. and the *gusanos*, who are determined to finally crush the Cuban Revolution.

There are contradictions in this picture. Mexico and Brazil still have left-wing governments. But while they have stood up to the U.S. in words, both Lula in Brazil and Sheinbaum in Mexico have also made numerous concessions. In the case of Bolivia, the mass uprising against Paz's neoliberal government opened up a real possibility for a counterattack. However, the leadership of the Bolivian Workers' Confederation made a pact with the government and called for a lifting of the blockades, thus betraying the indigenous peasant masses. This has caused a rift between the workers and peasants movements, weakening their ability to fight against the Bolivian bourgeoisie and its masters in Washington. Paz now has fertile ground to intensify his attacks against the masses. He has already imprisoned peasant leaders, attacked the unions and worsened living conditions. This outcome strengthens the grip of U.S. imperialism in the region.

Right-Wing Entrenchment in South Asia

The dynamics in South Asian countries present us with an advanced state of what is in store for the Global South. Squeezed between mounting external pressures and the gigantic needs at home, governments in countries like India and Pakistan are resorting to ever more religious nationalism, repression and bonapartism to manage the contradictions of their societies and secure their rule.

In India, the BJP has consolidated its national power through victories in recent state elections, in part made possible through mass cleansing of voters' lists. The left is increasingly irrelevant. The communists, having alienated their base over decades, have lost their last toehold in power, and the Maoist insurgency is being crushed by the state. In Pakistan, there is even more military-dictatorial entrenchment, crushing any dissent, whether it comes from the left, Kashmir or from former prime minister Imran Khan. But there is a limit to how much the masses will tolerate. As we enter a more unstable period, the social tinder accumulating at the base of these societies will only find more dynamite, threatening to explode and destabilize the rule of these Bonapartes, like the uprisings in neighboring Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The recent struggles in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and the student movement in India embody a similar potential.

Missed Opportunities

There have been important openings in recent years which could have turned the tide and put the working class on the political scene as a factor in shaping national and international events. This did not happen, whether it was the uptick in strikes in the West following the Covid pandemic or the Gen Z uprisings in the Global South. In all cases, there was no leadership ready to decisively capitalize on the upsurges, allowing the ruling class to regain the initiative. In each case the obstacle was not the absence of militancy but the absence of leadership.

The strike wave in Britain (2022-23) and the struggle against pension reform in France (2023) were defeated by trade-union leaders unwilling to escalate the struggle far enough to decisively defeat the governments. In the U.S., the wave of strikes and contract battles in 2023 (UPS, ILWU, UAW and Hollywood), as well as the 2024 Boeing and ILA strikes, were settled by increasing wages but leaving the other decisive questions driving the strikes unresolved. This had

Saul Loeb/AFP

Trump's alliance of Latin American villains assembles, March 7.

KCTU/X

KCTU-led mass protest in Seoul following then-president Yoon Suk-yeol's attempt to impose martial law, 4 December 2024. Banner reads: "Declaration of All-Out Resistance Movement, Nationwide Emergency Action."

the effect of containing the class struggle. Had these struggles been successful, the working class would have emerged as a stronger, revitalized and more united force, with confidence in its own ability to struggle and win.

In Greece, the Tempi struggle could have radically changed the course of the country with the potential to change the relationship of forces in favor of the proletariat after the big defeat of 2015. However, the workers movement failed to capitalize on the discontent of the masses. The KKE, the leadership of the workers movement and the left capitulated to the petty-bourgeois leadership of the movement that promoted a strategy of "no parties or colors," rejecting a working-class perspective. Their policy refused to transform the mass anger into a decisive struggle against imperialist subjugation, which caused the crime. This defeat has further weakened and demoralized the working class and the oppressed.

The recent Gen Z uprisings were important explosions of discontent fueled by rapidly deteriorating conditions for youth in the semicolonial world and seething hatred for their venal rulers. Yet the raw energy driving them was not on its own enough to improve the overall position of the masses. Some uprisings were crushed by repression (Indonesia, Morocco, Peru) while others led to right-wing governments (Bangladesh, Nepal) and a military regime (Madagascar). These outcomes stem from the absence of a coherent political leadership capable of charting a progressive course against the ruling classes and imperialist subjugation. That the working classes played a marginal role in these movements enhanced their heterogeneity, leaving them vulnerable to repression and co-optation.

The December 2024 coup by former South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol was quickly beaten back by militant union-led mass mobilizations. This stunning defeat put the working class in a position of strength. This backlash against the rabidly pro-U.S. agenda of Yoon Suk-yeol could have opened a major rift in the U.S.-South Korean alliance—the cornerstone of reaction in the country. However, the trade-union leaders sold out, siphoning off the anger into a vote for the equally pro-imperialist but less rabid Democratic Party, stabilizing the political situation for the ruling class.

The Liberal Left Breathing Its Last Gasp

Although the right is on the rise internationally, the growing instability and turmoil in the world nonetheless continue to push forward forms of left-wing resistance built up and shaped by the preceding period. In the realm of political parties, these include outfits such as the Greens and the already-moribund Your Party in Britain, Die Linke in Germany and La France Insoumise. Many observe these and gain a renewed sense of hope. This is as dangerous as it is deluded.

What is fueling this "left-wing resurgence" is unfortunately not a new wave of working-class militancy or deep working-class support. Rather, the driving force of these parties is the palpable sense of panic and desperation among large layers of middle-class liberals and progressive students, as well as minorities rightly terrified at the prospect of right-wing governments. These parties and their leaders represent a knee-jerk reaction to world events, grasping at a more radical version of liberalism in the face of uncertainty and chaos. Recycling the tired tropes of liberalism when the world order that sustained them is disappearing is not a recipe for success, but for spectacular disaster.

It is precisely this character which makes these parties impotent and which repels more conservative workers further away from them, strengthening the right wing in their respective countries: the Greens lag behind Reform in Britain, Die Linke well behind the AfD and Mélenchon behind the far right in France. What we are witnessing is not a resurgence of the left, but a tragicomedy being penned by the growing gap between the worsening objective situation and the completely useless subjective elements being pushed forward in response.

The proponents of this left-wing resurgence also point to the recent strike of the Italian workers for Palestine and the "block everything" movement in France. Yet these have failed to emerge as sustained movements. They ended as soon as they began, and have not shifted the overall trajectories of their countries. In France, the Rassemblement National is inching closer to the Presidential Palace and, in Italy, Meloni faces no significant challenge to power. In both cases, what we are witnessing is the incapacity of radical syndicalism—a strong tradition in both countries—to deal with the changing world situation.

U.S. Left Dumps Identity Politics, Not the Democrats

The second term of Donald Trump has provoked important developments on the left in the U.S. On the electoral field, Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani was elected mayor of New York on a bread-and-butter platform explicitly modelled on 20th-century "sewer socialism." Concretely, this platform is based on avoiding the most explosive social questions such as racial oppression and police brutality. This is an impor-

tant move away from the era of identity politics. Like other DSA electeds, Mamdani has lost no time in attacking the working class and black and Latino masses. However, this has not stopped most of the left hailing his victory as a great triumph, excusing his betrayals and refusing to wage a real fight in the DSA and the workers movement to break with the Democratic Party.

In response to ICE terror in the streets, there have been important and often heroic popular struggles. The high point of these mobilizations was achieved in Minneapolis following the murder of two anti-ICE protesters. While these struggles have shown that there is deep popular opposition to Trump's totalitarian deportation program, they have also shown the incapacity of the movement so far to break through the conservative leadership of the trade unions and the Democratic Party. Trump has been forced into temporary retreats, but his overall anti-immigrant offensive has not been broken.

socialistsanddemocrats

So 2008.

Axis of Resistance at a Dead End

The Islamic Republic's resistance against the U.S. and Israel's military onslaught has fostered illusions that this theocratic-capitalist regime can lead the fight against imperialism in West Asia. But while the Islamic Republic has shown it can stand up to the U.S., it has simultaneously shown that it is utterly unwilling and incapable of being a rallying point for genuine anti-imperialist resistance which can expel the U.S. from the region.

The Iranian ruling strata certainly has an interest in this, but it comes second to its interest in maintaining its own parasitic existence. As a result, it keeps resistance against foreign aggression within tight military-bureaucratic control, refusing to call on the masses of the region to enter the struggle. Moreover, the Islamic Republic's despotic internal regime divides the oppressed along national, religious and gender lines, making a unified anti-imperialist struggle impossible. Worse, its bloody repression of dissent pushes large layers of the population into the arms of monarchist, pro-imperialist reaction. To defeat imperialism and expel it from the region requires the broadest unity of the masses, which simply cannot be built on the politics of the Islamic Republic.

The resistance of the Palestinian people against the genocidal Zionist onslaught has been heroic. Yet this fact must not be used to mask the political and strategic impasse of the liberation movement. The Palestinian people have experienced a social and human catastrophe on an unprecedented scale. Gaza is in a complete state of disaster and Israel wants to annex entire swaths of what remains of it. The West Bank is worse than ever. This has exposed the failures of Hamas' strategy: reliance on liberal public opinion and the Arab regimes to defeat Israel, rather than on the masses of West Asia in a united struggle against Israel, the U.S. and the Arab regimes that conciliate them. In this impasse of the resistance, Hamas is basically negotiating the terms of its own disarmament and the movement has no strategic perspective for how to continue the struggle.

Ilkin Eskipehlivan/Anadolu

Police drag off a pro-Palestinian activist in Berlin, October 2025.

Palestine Movement Dissipating

The Gaza genocide stirred millions into action, and hundreds of thousands marched in major cities throughout the world for over two years. Yet this was not enough to put a stop to Netanyahu. In the West, the movement was paralyzed by the liberal outrage which dominated its politics and its reliance on politicians such as Rashida Tlaib in the U.S., who spoke out against Israel while being a representative of the very party which was facilitating the genocide. In Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Türkiye, the governments supported or even organized mass mobilizations while maintaining their alignment with the U.S.

The Palestine movement did not have as its strategic perspective to fuse the needs of the working class to the struggle for Palestinian liberation. This would have put real pressure on governments to break their support or conciliation of Israel. Instead, in most countries the mass Palestine marches were largely tolerated, regularly scheduled events which became the norm to let out anger. But anything that violated this norm and sought to challenge its direction remained relatively isolated and was brutally crushed by state forces. Today, the movement is in an enfeebled state. Revolutionaries must draw sober lessons from this outcome and work toward its political rearmament.

Brace for Attacks, Shocks and Upheavals

Overall, the balance of forces internationally is not one which favors the working class and oppressed for the foreseeable future. U.S. imperialism is on a rampage, the right

is ascendant and there is an ever-growing gap between the left and the working class in most countries.

For the moment, demoralization, apathy and a tendency toward retreat and self-preservation is the dominant trend in the working class. But class struggle does not proceed in a straight line. The populist right is capitalizing on built-up discontent and successfully pushing it into anti-immigrant and other reactionary channels. This model may work for some time, but it is fundamentally unable to solve any of the underlying drivers of social crisis. Those who look to the right to deliver on its promises—of growth, jobs and a return to the "good old days"—will be disappointed. Inevitably the working classes will be pushed into action. The question for revolutionaries is whether these confrontations will ultimately result in victories, strengthening the workers movement, or defeats and a further drift toward imperialist reaction.

In the Global South, chronic underdevelopment and the U.S. imperialist offensive are intensifying social crisis and deepening instability. The combination of imperialist strangulation, domestic decay and growing discontent at home is piling pressure on the corrupt national bourgeoisies, pushing them toward repression, bonapartism and nationalist divisions to prevent a united struggle. For revolutionaries, the task ahead is serious preparation. They must break out of the trap of either tailing every movement which erupts or resorting to abstract methods of the "pure" class struggle. The task is to merge the needs of the masses with the struggle for national liberation from imperialist domination.

PART III: A REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM

"No one has bothered to pave in advance the road of revolutionary upsurge for the proletariat. With inevitable halts and partial retreats it is necessary to move forward on a road crisscrossed by countless obstacles and covered with the debris of the past. Those who are frightened by this had better step aside."

—Leon Trotsky, "To Build Communist Parties and an International Anew" (1933)

Fight the U.S. Empire!

U.S. imperialism is the main force dragging the world toward barbarism. Fighting the U.S. empire is thus central for the international proletariat and oppressed everywhere. The working class in the U.S. is made to pay for the global ambitions of its ruling class through militarism, austerity and attacks on its living standards. Across the imperialist countries and in the U.S.-aligned semicolonies, the ruling classes remain deeply tied to the existing order. Whether it is allegiance to NATO and trans-Atlanticism in the West, Japan marching onto the road of rearmament, or the Quad in the Indian Ocean, opposing the alliance with the U.S. forms an integral part of the struggle against the ruling classes in these countries.

In Ukraine, soldiers are being sent to the slaughter for the interests of the Western imperialists and their Ukrainian puppets. In neocolonial countries and workers states facing sanctions, economic pressure or military threats, the struggle against national and social oppression will bring millions into motion, posing the overthrow of imperialist domination and the national bourgeoisies. Everywhere, the struggle against U.S. imperialism provides a basis for uniting workers across borders and forging an international revolutionary leadership capable of challenging the existing world order.

For a Proletarian Strategy Against U.S. Imperialism!

Revolutionaries must build the strongest opposition to the U.S. empire. But the decisive question is which political strategy and methods of struggle are capable of actually defeating it in a progressive manner. The emancipation of humanity from barbarism depends not on the victory of one rival ruling class or geopolitical bloc over another, but on the revolutionary triumph of the international proletariat. The means and methods of the anti-imperialist struggle are inseparable from its aims: permissible only are those means which build the political independence and unity of the working masses. Anything to the contrary ultimately deepens national divisions, strengthens the ruling classes and therefore weakens the struggle against imperialism.

This is the central flaw of "campism." It rejects proletarian independence as the guiding thread of the anti-imperialist struggle and supports any force opposed to the U.S. and its allies, regardless of its class character or policies. Under this logic, states such as Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, or alliances like BRICS+ are treated as progressive poles of resistance simply because they present a challenge to U.S. dominance. This logic of lesser-evilism ends up excusing the crimes and oppression carried out by such forces on the grounds that they weaken a rival.

The implications of this approach are disastrous. Siding with Russia in the Ukraine war, for example, on the basis that it is fighting a NATO proxy accepts and legitimizes the national oppression of Ukrainians as a lesser evil in the strug-

Melvin James Urubio/NurPhoto

Protest against U.S. military presence, Manila, July 4.

gle against U.S. imperialism. This further divides the working class in Eastern Europe, binding it to its respective rulers, thus obstructing its revolutionary unity against the dominant forces responsible for the current status quo in the region: the U.S., EU and NATO. The same logic applies in Iran, where political support to the Islamic Republic against the U.S. repels the Kurdish masses and other oppressed minorities, clearing the terrain for pro-imperialist forces to step in as their saviors against an oppressive regime, thereby deepening divisions and strengthening the hold of imperialism in the region. In both cases, what is necessary is to take a stand against U.S. imperialism while putting forward a proletarian strategy.

AFP

Mass anti-government protest in Rawalakot, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, June 24.

For National Liberation Under a Communist Banner!

The offensive of U.S. imperialism is further subjugating and devastating the countries of the Global South, giving the struggle for national liberation an ever-greater urgency. Revolutionaries must oppose the economic and military predations of the U.S. and its allies, whose wars, sanctions and coercion are unleashing havoc on oppressed nations. This means taking a side with the forces directly under the gun, from Palestine to Iran and Cuba. Standing firmly against national oppression everywhere is a precondition for uniting the international proletariat against imperialism.

The decisive task is to fight for leadership of the national liberation struggle in opposition to the national bourgeoisie, which claims to represent the interests of the whole nation and uses nationalism to bolster its authority. As an exploiting class, it will ultimately seek to restrain, divert or crush the independent mobilization of the masses in order to preserve its own power, thereby betraying the struggle against imperialism. Revolutionaries must expose its vacillations by pushing ***forward*** the struggle against imperialism.

The Marxist and anti-imperialist movement is divided into two wrong trends. One rejects national liberation struggles as inherently bourgeois, proclaiming socialist revolution while abandoning the real aspirations of the masses. In so doing, it leaves the masses to the leadership of the nationalists. The other trend tails behind the national bourgeoisie, especially its radical or anti-imperialist wings, likewise tying the masses to nationalist forces and abandoning oppressed groups to manipulation by pro-imperialist forces. Both trends abandon the central task: building proletarian leadership of the struggle for national liberation.

For a Workers and Peasants Alliance!

Due to direct colonial and neocolonial domination, unresolved democratic questions remain a defining feature of the semicolonial world. Foremost among them is the agrarian question: the fate of millions of poor peasants, landless laborers and agricultural workers. The onslaught by U.S. imperialism against the semicolonies makes these layers some of its primary victims. Its relentless pursuit of control over natural resources, the expansion of agribusiness conglomerates, land speculation and rising prices caused by crises and wars are further ruining this segment of the population.

The working classes, often linked directly to the countryside through ties of kinship, are also under attack, and so have a material interest in defending the rural masses and the entire nation against further subjugation. The only effective way to resist is to forge an alliance of workers and poor peasants to jointly defend their living conditions. The task of revolutionaries is to build this alliance as a means

Kenny Holston/Getty

President Xi rolls out red carpet for mass-murdering Trump cabal, May 14.

to advance the anti-imperialist struggle and, in so doing, expose the impotence of the national bourgeoisies in confronting the U.S. offensive.

Defend China! Down With the CPC Bureaucrats!

The defense of China will be a decisive test for revolutionaries in the coming period, just as the defense of the Soviet Union was throughout much of the 20th century. China cannot be understood apart from the 1949 Revolution: although many of its gains have been greatly eroded, the social foundations created by that revolution have not been overturned. The People's Liberation Army, which destroyed the old ruling classes, remains the armed force of the state which emerged from this revolutionary process. For U.S. imperialism, whose global position is increasingly challenged by China's rise, counterrevolution in China has become a strategic necessity. The defense of China is therefore inseparable from the struggle against U.S. imperialism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union demonstrated that the defeat of a proletarian social order does not merely transform one country; it reshapes the global balance of forces. U.S. imperialism's victory over the USSR opened a period of unprecedented domination, allowing it to project its power with far fewer restraints. A similar defeat in China would represent an even greater historic reversal—the destruction and subordination of one of the largest concentrations of productive forces on the planet—worsening conditions for workers internationally. The question is therefore not only the fate of China, but the fate of the international proletariat. Failing to defend China or equating it to the U.S. can only strengthen imperialism's offensive and accelerate the descent toward barbarism.

The defense of China, however, cannot be separated from the political independence of the proletariat. Defending China does not mean political support for the CPC bureaucracy, which has repeatedly demonstrated that it seeks accommodation with the imperialist order rather than relying on the international working class to challenge it. In fact, the CPC actively alienates the toilers in other countries through its nationalist military, political and trade policies. The defense of China must be combined with a struggle against the CPC bureaucracy, whose rule prevents the working class from acting as the decisive force in defending and extending the gains of the revolution.

Break the Popular Front!

In response to a rising right, a growing tendency on the left seeks alliances with "progressive" forces to block reaction, abandoning class independence in the process. This is the popular front—tying the workers movement to the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie. This prevents the working class from developing an independent struggle against the material basis of right-wing reaction.

The record of the popular front speaks for itself. It always fails to stop reaction. At best, it delays the process, only for it to return with greater strength. In France, repeated "Republican" alliances have not halted the country's rightward trajectory; the far right is now closer to power than ever. In India, the coalition between the Congress, communist parties and other bourgeois parties has not broken the consolidation of the BJP. The lesson is clear: the right cannot be defeated by aligning with the forces that fueled it.

The task of revolutionaries is to ***break the popular front***. It is not enough to condemn it; workers and oppressed masses must be shown concretely how alliances with the bourgeoisie are detrimental to their interests. This requires that revolutionaries actively intervene and advance tactics toward formations like the DSA in the U.S., Mélenchon's party in France or the communist parties in India to sharpen the contradictions between the aspirations of the base on the one hand and the dead-end strategy of the leadership on the other. Failure to fight for such a perspective can only leave the working class and left in the hands of the class enemy.

For the United Front!

The rise of right-wing reaction has meant an increase in state repression against left-wing activists, as well as a growth of fascist attacks and provocations. More broadly, in the face of imperialist aggression and assaults on living standards and democratic rights, the socialist and workers movement is often fragmented and weak. To counter this, communists must champion the united front. The goal of the united front must be to unite the broadest forces possible in a struggle in the interests of the proletariat.

Yet this simple point is the source of great confusion on the left. On the one hand, many socialist organizations believe it is opportunist to form any bloc with nonrevolutionary forces—leaving the oppressed divided in the face of attack. On the other hand, it is common for socialists to justify opportunist lash-ups in the name of the united front. Usually, this takes the form of placing the tactic of the united front—the need to rally the broadest forces—above the strategy it must serve. As Trotsky explained:

> "March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grezesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one's hands."
>
> —"For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism" (8 December 1931)

Thus, the united front can be concluded with any forces—from union bureaucrats to bourgeois politicians—

Open Letter to the Council of the Left:

You Can't Unite the Left Unless You FIGHT the Pogromists!

19 JUNE 2026—As the June 30th deadline announced by March & March and others looms, the burning question facing the Left is the threat of anti-immigrant and tribalist violence on a scale not seen since 2008. Ramaphosa and the GNU are appeasing these reactionary forces, gladly playing to the xenophobic gallery to distract from Phala Phala and gain some breathing space to redouble the neoliberal onslaught that is Operation Vulindlela. If the pogromists are

Ihsaan Haffejee/Anadolu Vijay Prashad

As anti-immigrant riots (left) swept South Africa, SACP-led Conference of the Left conciliated MK Party, supporter of xenophobic rallies. Spartacist/South Africa fought this capitulation.

as long as it serves a specific cause in the interests of the workers movement: from repelling a fascist attack or campaigning to free imprisoned activists all the way to defending a strike and fighting attacks on living standards. Crucially, this includes uniting with nationalist and resistance forces against a specific imperialist aggression—the anti-imperialist united front.

The crucial purpose of the united front is for communists to demonstrate, in action, the superiority of a revolutionary strategy to advance even the most partial struggles of the working class against the liberal and legalistic strategies of bourgeois and non-revolutionary elements.

Unite the Oppressed, Ditch the Liberals!

The breakdown of the liberal order and the rise of the right are fueling social antagonisms within the working class. Divisions between immigrant and native-born workers, black and white workers, and men and women, and over questions such as trans rights, are increasingly weaponized against the oppressed. The right directs anger over social decline toward minorities, while liberals respond through moral appeals and identity politics, further entrenching these divisions. In semicolonial countries, these polarizations often lead to ethnic conflict and bloodshed. Revolutionaries must fight to overcome these divisions and build the unity necessary to strengthen the struggle of the masses.

Cheney Orr/Reuters

Black woman surrounded by Patriot Front fascists on 250th anniversary of American independence.

This unity must be built by showing that the defense of the oppressed is in the material interest of the working class as a whole. Bigotry and chauvinism weaken the struggle against the ruling class by pitting segments of the working class against one another. For example, the polarizations around immigrants and refugees in countries from Britain to South Africa is rooted in social decline: scarce jobs, collapsing services and deteriorating living conditions. The blame lies not with immigrants, but with ruling classes that have allowed society to decay in order to protect their own interests. The solution is a united struggle of all workers against the ruling class.

However, much of the Marxist left either denounces reactionary ideas and their supporters without a strategy to win workers away from them or adopts economism, sidelining the specific struggles of oppressed groups in favor of economic demands. One leaves workers under the influence of reaction; the other leaves divisions intact and pushes minorities into the arms of liberals. Revolutionaries must reject both errors and show how the working class must champion the cause of all the oppressed to advance its own emancipation.

Turn the Trade Unions into Revolutionary Organs!

The working class is entering a period of mounting attacks on its living standards, rights and organizations. Yet the trade unions enter this period weakened by decades of defeats and by the class-collaborationist course of their bureaucracies. Against this, revolutionaries must fight within the unions for a class-struggle leadership.

This means intervening in every battle over wages, conditions and democratic rights, connecting these struggles to

the broader fight against capitalism and imperialism. It also means breaking out of narrow craft limits and organizing the unorganized layers of workers. Only through such concrete struggles can the influence of the union tops be defeated and the unions transformed into true instruments of proletarian resistance. Unfortunately, much of the revolutionary left does not approach unions from this standpoint. Where it has influence in the unions, its work is marred by the twin plagues of opportunism and ultraleftism.

Opportunism consists in adapting to existing union leaderships, supporting "left" bureaucrats or simply advocating for the existing bureaucracy to be more militant. This substitutes pressure on the bureaucracy for a struggle to replace it on a revolutionary basis. The same is true when left forces take control of union apparatuses but preserve bureaucratic methods, or where union work is reduced to immediate economic demands while avoiding the political struggles needed to unite the class against divisions of race, nationality and gender. Ultraleftism is the opposite error: it either substitutes adventurist confrontation for the patient work of building an opposition to the bureaucracy or abstains from the unions altogether because they are controlled by the bureaucracy. Whether through adaptation or abandonment, these deviations leave the bureaucracy's hold intact and strengthen the forces responsible for the defeats of the working class.

美帝国主义从越南南方滚出去!
美帝国主义从非洲滚出去!
美帝国主义从拉丁美洲滚出去
美帝国主义从台湾滚出去!
美 帝 国 主 义 从 它 霸 占 的 一 切 地 方 滚 出 去
U.S. Imperialism Must Get Out of All Places It Occupies!
L'impérialisme américain hors de tous les territoires qu'il occupe!
¡Fuera los imperialistas norteamericanos de todos los territorios que ocupan!
Renmin Meishu Chubanshe/IISH

PART IV: THE TASK OF REVOLUTIONARY REGROUPMENT

"Mass actions tend as a rule to wash away secondary and episodic disagreements and to aid the fusion of friendly and close tendencies. Conversely, ideological groupings in a period of stagnation or ebb tide disclose a great tendency toward differentiation, splits, and internal struggles. We cannot leap out of the period in which we live. We must pass through it. A clear, precise ideological differentiation is unconditionally necessary. It prepares future successes."

—Leon Trotsky, "Groupings in the Communist Opposition" (31 March 1929)

The Marxist movement is not prepared for the upheavals on the horizon. It is small, splintered into innumerable competing groupings and increasingly isolated from the working classes. This crisis is not simply a result of unfavorable conditions, but of political disorientation first and foremost: the failure to build a revolutionary opposition to the liberal world order in the preceding period, leaving the ground open for the right wing to capitalize on the backlash today.

As the U.S. tears up the old status quo and pursues a reactionary realignment, the left is mired in disorientation about the fundamental dynamics shaping world events. There are segments which proclaim that U.S. hegemony has already collapsed and place China and Russia on the same plane as the U.S. Others mirror the same mistake by hailing China and Russia as anti-imperialist heroes. On the political plane, the vast majority of the left denies or downplays the defeats suffered by the international proletariat in recent years, alibiing the misleaders and drastically miscalculating the balance of class forces for the coming battles. As a result, many project major breakthroughs for Marxists in the short term. Like the stock market, these illusions will soon burst as they collide with reality.

We do not claim to have solved the crisis of the left, nor do we have all the answers; that is the claim of fools. But we have advanced some key elements of Marxist analysis and program for the coming period. We have sought to outline the burning tasks of this epoch: building the fight against U.S. imperialism without abandoning proletarian independence, fighting right-wing reaction without subordinating workers to liberal forces, championing national liberation and uniting the struggles of the oppressed with a revolutionary class perspective. We have rooted this approach in a concrete analysis of world developments. It is around these lines that we seek to regroup the Marxist movement.

Such regroupment requires the patient work of programmatic and theoretical clarification. But this alone is not enough. Revolutionaries must seek to advance the concrete struggles of the masses in a direction corresponding to the independent interests of the working class as a whole, exposing the betrayals of misleaders and demonstrating the necessity of a revolutionary program in practice. Through this process, the basis for political clarification and unification can be forged. Only in this way can the movement overcome conservatism, bureaucratism and sectarianism. Only in this way can we forge the revolutionary leadership the epoch demands.■

ICL Conference…

(continued from page 2)

Unite Against the U.S. Empire!" (see page 12), was voted unanimously by all ICL delegates, except the sole delegate from an internal minority. It was also endorsed by several delegates from the other organizations. It argues that the primary contradiction at the heart of the world system can be reduced to the following dynamic: U.S. hegemony is being undermined by the rise of China, but the Communist Party (CPC) is not trying to upend the U.S. order. The absence of any force currently capable of decisively defeating the U.S. empire, including the world proletariat, cedes the initiative to the imperialists. This basic dynamic is behind the reactionary offensive against the masses and oppressed nations. This point led to a rich and productive debate on imperialism, the class character of China, the balance sheet of recent international struggles and how to overcome the polarizations within the left and the masses on an independent proletarian basis. It was followed by a panel on different regions of the world (see pages 36-52).

From this, we proceeded to a historical discussion on the collapse of the Fourth International (FI) and why none of the 70-odd "true descendants" of Trotskyism, including ourselves, have been able to draw the correct lessons from the history of our movement (see page 26). Disoriented by an incorrect prognosis for the immediate postwar period, the different trends in the FI adapted their programmatic outlook to fit a preconceived template rather than re-evaluate a changed world situation, specifically the dominance of U.S. imperialism and the reinforced authority of Stalinism. This disorientation was further exacerbated by the 1949 Chinese Revolution and the tidal wave of anti-colonial struggles that followed, because the FI was unable to chart an independent, revolutionary course in opposition to the forces leading these struggles. This resulted in the FI being sealed off from the decisive struggles of the new epoch, with a few notable exceptions. This historical discussion broadened our understanding of the crisis of the Trotskyist movement today, which is facing many of the same problems.

The last major session of the conference focused on forging a revolutionary trend. This session capped off the part of the conference open to invited guests and addressed the role that a small organization like the ICL can play in rebuilding the revolutionary left. It included a debate on the source of the crisis of the Marxist left and a perspective for building the ICL and pursuing revolutionary regroupment. The report outlined a clear strategic perspective around which to organize the work of our international (see page 3).

A small step toward revolutionary regroupment was achieved by the ICL and the ISA-R agreeing on a "Memorandum of Understanding" toward the fusion of our two organizations. The ICL's conference document constituted the political basis for this agreement. The fusion process will be a real test of our ability to combine the best aspects of our respective political traditions and present a positive example for the rest of the left. We will seek to advance this process through common work and by mutually opening aspects of the internal life of our two organizations. This agreement was approved unanimously by majority ICL delegates and the ISA-R delegates.

We also held important educational sessions on two strategic countries: Venezuela and Türkiye. In the former, delegates discussed the lessons of Chavismo and corrected our previous line, which essentially equated Chavismo with neoliberalism, thereby denying the legitimate aspirations behind the groundswell of support for Hugo Chávez (see page 60). The educational session on Türkiye gave a Marxist explanation for the formation of the modern Turkish state and the emergence of Kemalism, to this day the main ideological obstacle to cohering a revolutionary left.

¡Defender las conquistas de las mujeres cubanas!
¡Petróleo para la isla!
el imperialismo yanqui!
¡No a la capitulación!
¡POR UNA DIRECCION COMUNISTA DE LA LUCHA CONTRA EL IMPERIALISMO YANQUI!
Grupo Espartaquista de México

Spartacist

Conference attendees bolstered Spartacist contingent at Cuba solidarity demonstration in Mexico City, July 2026.

The conference adopted a motion critical of the first leaflet we issued following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which led with the kicker "Only Death and Defeat with Hamas" (10 October 2023). This approach put us in direct opposition to the sentiments of the Palestinian and pro-Palestine masses following October 7. ICL majority delegates voted to publish this correction in the upcoming *Spartacist* (see page 35).

Also noteworthy was the voluntary departure of a two-member minority in the Mexican section of the ICL toward the end of the conference. For over a year, they were given full democratic rights and freedom to argue their views throughout the party. They were also granted a 15-minute counterposed report on the world situation at this conference. Having failed to convince anyone of their views, they decided to leave our ranks.

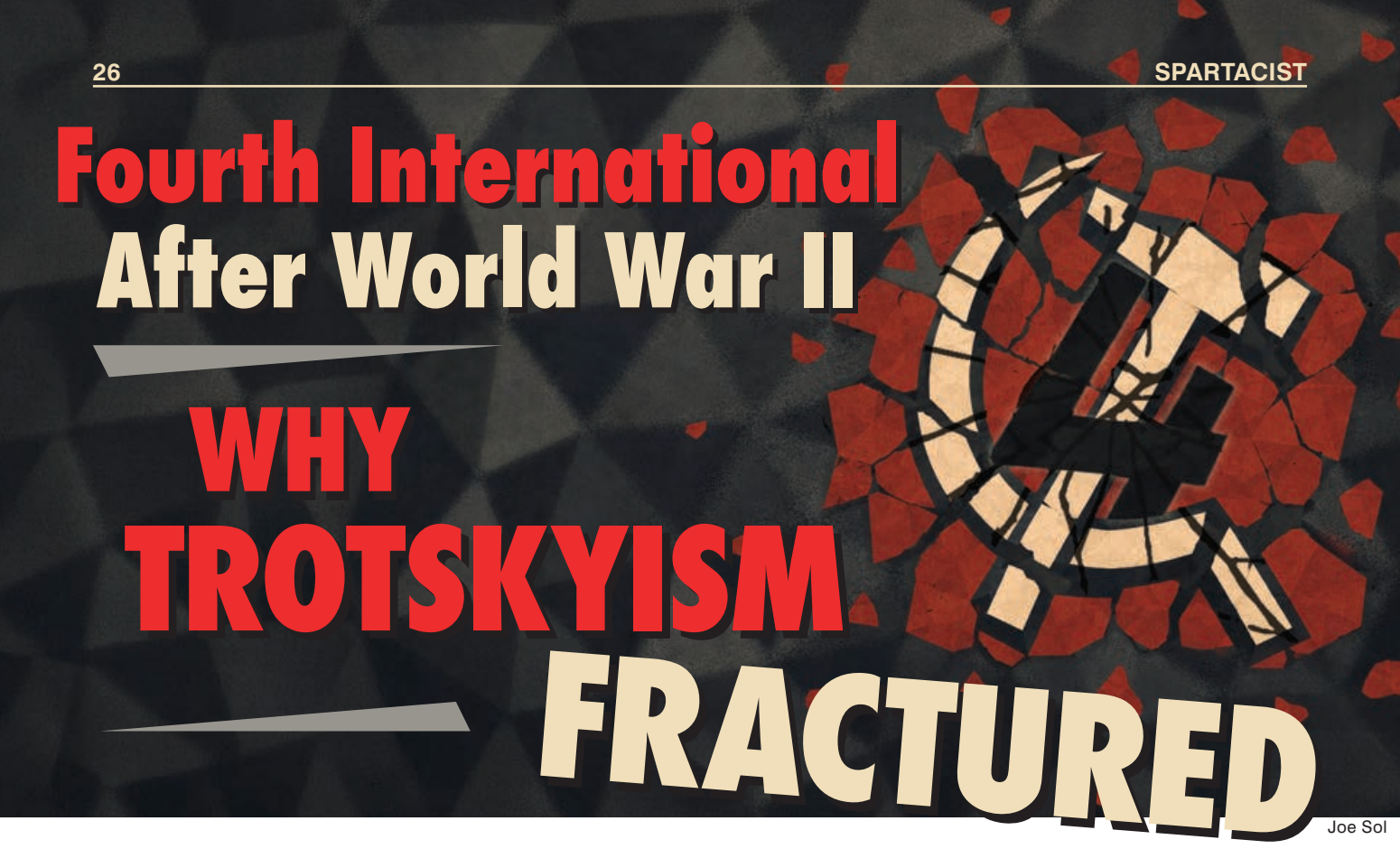
The ICL made a historic breakthrough at this conference by launching a new Chinese-language publication named *Permanent Revolution*. Its aim is to cohere a revolutionary current within the Chinese left on a Trotskyist basis, i.e., unconditional defense of the Chinese workers state, but opposition to the policies of the CPC bureaucracy that squanders the revolutionary energy of the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers and peasants.

Finally, one of the central purposes of the conference was to elect a new international leadership. These elections were notable because the outgoing leadership did not present a slate, as has long been our practice. The result was a much richer discussion and a competitive election, both important in ensuring that we have the leadership we need for the upcoming challenges we face. The conference was a tremendous success, preparing the Sparts to raise a revolutionary banner on the international left in the current turbulent period.

- ***Join Us in Building the ICL!***
- ***Workers of the World, Unite Against the U.S. Empire!***

Fourth International After World War II

WHY TROTSKYISM FRACTURED



Joe Sol

BY VINCENT DAVID

This presentation, edited for publication, was given at the July 2026 Ninth International Conference of the ICL, held in Mexico City.

In 1933, after Hitler's rise to power and the disastrous betrayal of the German working class by the Comintern, Trotsky declared the Third International dead for the proletarian revolution and called for the foundation of a new, Fourth International. Five years of struggle against incredible odds—from state repression to Stalinist betrayals and fascist victories—led to the founding congress of the Fourth International in 1938. The founding document, known as the *Transitional Program*, made a proud and defiant promise: to rally the internationalist forces behind a clear banner on the eve of the Second World War and cohere those cadres who, if small in numbers, nevertheless were the "pledges for the future."

Tragically, the Fourth International would not live up to this promise. The war almost destroyed the organization. Countless among our best comrades, who fought heroically against terrible odds, were murdered at the hands of fascists or Stalinists—starting with Trotsky himself, in this very city. And emerging from the war, the Fourth International faced a world it could not understand, with most of its parties remaining small groups.

By 1953, the Fourth International had fractured in a fatal split. And those splinters would themselves split again, and again, most often in confused and obscure disputes. Fast forward to today, there have been at least 71 different rival international tendencies claiming the mantle of Trotskyism, with at least 35 still in existence (according to comrade Markov's research). And each of these currents would proclaim themselves to be the real continuity of Trotskyism, against all other "revisionists." These are the symptoms of a movement in crisis, which we must understand if we are to claim to unite revolutionary forces today.

Eighty-eight years have passed since the founding congress of the Fourth International. The world has changed greatly: from the rise of new workers states to the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR. ***Yet, the very same questions that broke the backs of far more experienced cadres are haunting us once again.*** U.S. hegemony, which was established as Trotskyists were emerging from the ruins of World War II, is now in decline, lashing out globally to maintain its position. Nationalist forces, pushed into conflict with U.S. imperialism, are exerting a powerful pull on oppressed peoples. The primary counterweight to the American empire is the Communist Party of China—the very same party whose rise to power in 1949 so deeply disoriented Fourth Internationalists. And the revolutionary movement is today in an even deeper state of weakness, disorientation and isolation from the working class. ***Either we learn from this history or we are condemned to repeat it.***

History and Method

How can we learn from history when the Trotskyist movement is incapable of telling its own? For the anti-Pabloites, Michel Pablo, depicted as an almost cartoonish villain, single-handedly destroyed the International by suddenly embracing opportunism. For Pablo's defenders, Cannon and Healy were mere sterile dogmatists, stuck in their ways. For the Workers Power tendency, the International was destroyed by "epigones" who abandoned Trotsky's doctrine. The Revolutionary Communist International (RCI) preaches that Ted Grant ***alone*** understood dialectics, while everyone else was ignorant of it. And our own tendency's "Genesis of Pabloism" (1972)—despite genuine insights—insisted that Cannon held the flame of "revolutionary continuity," even though he clung to sterile orthodoxy.

For most young militants today, the history of the Fourth International feels like an incomprehensible web of obscure squabbles. And it feels incomprehensible because it is—at least with this method. History is reduced to personal betrayals and psychological defects, with tendencies arguing over who wrote what in some article or internal bulletin decades ago. This confusion is not an accident. It is a reflection of the crisis of our movement. Every tendency writes history from the standpoint of its own existence, forced to create an unbroken line of orthodoxy that conveniently ends with their own small group as the sole "true heirs" of Trotskyism. This is why you cannot make sense of anything. Yet, for those outside of the Trotskyist movement, what is patently obvious is that our entire movement has been in a crisis since 1945.

Who is right and how to determine it? The study of the Fourth International poses pointblank the question: what is revolutionary leadership? Organizations claiming to be revolutionary cannot be judged by programmatic purity on paper, by the personal qualities of leaders, or even by the accuracy of their prognoses. The true revolutionary mettle of a tendency is tested concretely in the course of great events: did it fight for a course of struggle which advanced the interests of the working class as a whole? Or did it become the tool of another class?

This is not an abstraction. The postwar period saw the birth of the American empire and the launch of the Cold War against the USSR. It saw the Red Army liquidate the capitalist classes in half of Europe. It saw mass social revolutions led by Stalinist forces in Yugoslavia, China and Korea. And it saw a titanic wave of colonial uprisings under nationalist leadership. ***These are the tests***. The question to pose to evaluate revolutionaries is: were they able to stand on the right side of the barricades? And if so, did they put forward an independent strategy to genuinely advance these struggles—one capable of breaking the masses away from their non-revolutionary leaders?

Viewed from this standpoint, it becomes obvious that none of the tendencies of the Fourth International rose to this challenge. This does not mean that specific tendencies, at a specific juncture, were not able to carry out a revolutionary intervention. And it certainly does not negate the courage and determination of thousands of militants who sincerely fought for the Fourth International and sometimes paid for this with their lives. But to ensure their sacrifices were not in vain we must develop a coherent explanation for the collapse of our movement—one that rejects self-serving factional fables and goes directly to the root of the crisis of our movement.

The Road from the SWP to Trotskyism . . . page 2
The Faces of Economism . . . page 24
SPARTACIST 4
NUMBER 21 FALL 1972 25 CENTS
The SWP and the Fourth International, 1946-54:
Genesis of Pabloism

1972 article presented Spartacist analysis of Fourth International's degeneration.

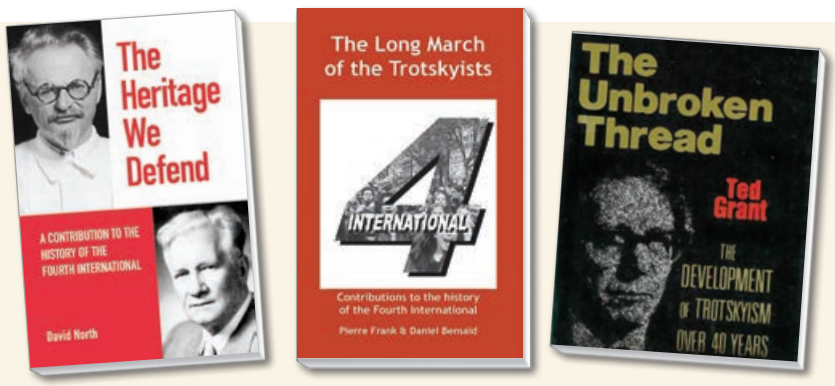
Thesis

The central task posed in the postwar world was the struggle against the American empire. The task of Trotskyists was to put forward an internationalist and revolutionary strategy to defeat it, in opposition to the strategies of the Stalinists and nationalists, the main forces leading workers and the oppressed.

Neither the Pabloites nor the anti-Pabloites were able to do this. After the war, the movement retreated into rigid, prewar dogmas. As I will explain, this sterile orthodoxy bred Stalinophobia, which, in the heat of the Cold War, generated a sharp reaction in the opposite direction: liquidation into Stalinism and nationalism—what will be called "Pabloism." Ultimately, because both those trends failed the test, neither could justify the independent existence of Trotskyism as a living, necessary political force for the working class in the postwar era. This is the root cause of the 1953 split as well as the endless succession of splits into ever smaller groupings.

Thus, should we simply throw away this heritage? This would only guarantee the repeat of the same errors. Every tendency in the Fourth International reflected a piece of social reality, and held a grain of truth. The Pabloites understood that revolutionaries had to link themselves to the masses, particularly in the national liberation movements. As for the anti-Pabloites, they understood that the Marxist program had to be defended against the blind alley of nationalism and Stalinism. Both were right, yet both lacked a method capable of combining these elements—which is the essence of revolutionary leadership. Fractured into two broken halves, the movement was condemned to a false choice between opportunist liquidation and sectarian isolation.

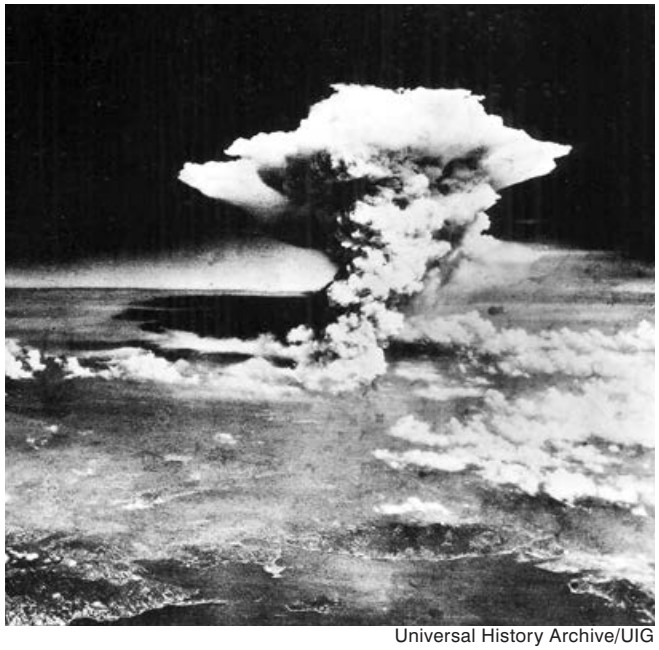
I cannot tell the entire story of the Fourth International today. But what I can try to do is to rescue some vital political lessons necessary for our tasks.


The Heritage We Defend
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL
David North
The Long March of the Trotskyists
4 INTERNATIONAL
Contributions to the history of the Fourth International
Pierre Frank & Daniel Bensaïd
The Unbroken Thread
Ted Grant
THE DEVELOPMENT OF TROTSKYISM OVER 40 YEARS

"Every tendency writes history from the standpoint of its own existence, forced to create an unbroken line of orthodoxy that conveniently ends with their own small group."

The Postwar World

The end of World War II opened a new chapter in history. And it also tore up the



Universal History Archive/UIG

Hiroshima, 1945: The dropping of the atomic bomb signaled postwar hegemony of U.S. imperialism.

playbook the Trotskyist movement had relied upon for over a decade. Trotskyist cadres entered 1945 armed with a prognosis derived from the pre-war era. The Fourth International predicted a deep economic crash, the collapse of the Soviet bureaucracy and the rapid discrediting of Stalinist and Social Democratic parties as they betrayed the postwar revolutionary wave. However, history took an unforeseen turn.

While the temporary diplomatic theatre of Yalta and Potsdam initially masked the new world order—with the USSR collaborating with its allies to carve up the world and crush revolutionary openings—a profound structural shift was happening. The dropping of the atomic bomb and the complete dominance of the U.S. over all other capitalist powers signaled the end of the multipolar, interimperialist rivalries. In their place now stood the American empire.

Through its financial, industrial and military dominance, the U.S. rebuilt the old imperial powers (Japan, Germany as well as France and Britain) and unified them under its leadership. Instead of sinking into economic crisis, the U.S. was able to marshal its enormous resources and global pillage to prop up the world capitalist economy and rebuild bourgeois democracy in Europe. All of this for a single purpose: to confront and destroy the Soviet Union.

On the other side, the Soviet bureaucracy emerged from the war massively strengthened. The Red Army occupied half of Europe, and Communist parties commanded the allegiance of millions of workers. While a revolutionary wave did erupt in Western Europe, it was swiftly quashed by the Stalinists. Instead, the center of gravity of revolutionary struggles shifted to the colonial world, where a decades-long wave of titanic uprisings unfolded, exploiting the vacuum left by the defeat of Japan and the decline of the old British and French empires. These millions in revolt looked for leadership not in the small groups of the Fourth International, but in powerful Stalinist and nationalist forces.

Exceptions to this were in Bolivia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, where Trotskyists were able to win mass influence. But I will not be dealing with these particular cases as they require their own study.

The Great Disorientation

Most parties of the Fourth International found themselves isolated and profoundly disoriented. The leaders of the movement—from Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, who emerged from the underground in Europe, to James P. Cannon in the U.S.—proved incapable of squaring this new reality with the literal text of the 1938 *Transitional Program*. Rather than responding to new problems with new answers, they clung to outdated predictions and retreated into a defensive, rigid orthodoxy. Year after year, official documents and resolutions stubbornly predicted an imminent economic meltdown, the rise of bonapartism in Europe and the coming World War III, completely blind to the capitalist stabilization occurring in Europe.

This disorientation paralyzed their strategy toward the masses. Fourth International leaders mechanically assumed that the betrayals of the Stalinists would automatically drive masses into the ranks of the Fourth International. All that was needed was to denounce Stalinist betrayals, past and present, and raise transitional demands—which were elevated in a formalistic manner as the solution to every problem—and *voilà*.

The 1946 theses of the Second International Conference proclaimed:

> "The swelling of the ranks of the traditional organizations in Europe, above all of the Stalinist parties, reflected the first stage of radicalization of the masses, and this has now reached its peak almost everywhere. ***The phase of decline is beginning***."
>
> —"The New Imperialist Peace and the Building of the Parties of the Fourth International"

In the U.S., the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP) 1946 central document "Theses on the American Revolution" projected an economic crash and working-class explosions, completely ignored the Communist Party and predicted uninterrupted successes for the SWP. The Bolshevik Leninist Party of India fought Gandhi's Congress Party with the assumption that given its bourgeois character it would never be able to free India from British rule—a course which would soon face a rude awakening. In Palestine, the Fourth International failed to take the side of the Arab forces during the Nakba (see "Marxists & Palestine: 100 Years of Failure," *Spartacist* No. 69, August 2024).

Stuck in sterile orthodoxy, the Fourth International was incapable of understanding how the Cold War was forcing Stalinist and nationalist leaders into confrontation with the American empire and its imperial partners. Because they could not grasp these living dynamics, they dismissed mass support for these leaderships as mere subjective and temporary confusion. Unable to engage the real contradictions within these movements, the International retreated into an abstract, Europe-centric framework—paying lip service to the colonial revolution while remaining politically blind to its true significance and specific tasks.

Dismissed Warnings: Morrow and Grant

There were multiple attempts by cadres to challenge this sterile framework, notably the Goldman-Morrow faction in the American SWP and the British Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP).

Against the SWP majority, Felix Morrow argued that U.S. imperialism was pouring massive resources into Europe,

which was stabilizing capitalism, rendering the International's catastrophist predictions completely moot. Dismissed as a "rightist" who wanted to liquidate the socialist program in favor of democratic demands, Morrow was in fact combating the movement's maximalist outlook. Recognizing a real revival of democratic illusions among European workers, he insisted that democratic demands were vital to compete with mass Social-Democratic and Communist parties. As he wrote:

> "The problem of problems is to tear the masses away from the SP and CP. The way to do this is on the vital political questions which actually arise and appear vital to the masses, and not on the questions ***we*** think vital."
>
> —"European Perspectives and Policy" (July 1945)

At least this had the merit of posing the tasks on the right terrain. But the International leaders responded mainly with rigidity—counterposing democratic demands to socialist ones. It is this sterility that drove Morrow toward Max Shachtman and led to his rejection of the defense of the USSR in 1946 and to his expulsion the same year. The point isn't that Goldman and Morrow were right. They did bend toward bourgeois-democratic illusions. They also adopted a Zionist position regarding Palestine. But they did put their finger on real problems which, if properly debated and answered, could have reoriented the International.

Yevgeny Khaldei/DPA

Soviet Army liberates Berlin, May 1945.

Jock Haston and Ted Grant of the British RCP also fought the International's wrong analysis. At the 1946 Conference and 1948 World Congress the RCP submitted extensive amendments correctly identifying the early stages of the postwar boom. Grant debunked the International's apocalyptic perspectives, characterizing—correctly in my opinion—the situation in Europe as a counterrevolution in democratic form. For these insights, Grant and his cothinkers were marginalized by Healy's maneuvers and eventually purged.

However, reading Grant's critique today, one is struck by how it reflects the same academic method that plagues the RCI—the heirs of Ted Grant today. For Grant, just like the RCI, perspectives were everything. Politics was reduced to an intellectual exercise of analysis, with Grant's perspectives almost never drawing concrete political tasks. Grant was right about the postwar economic boom—but what did that actually mean for the tasks of the party? It was never spelled out. Later, Grant described, in large part accurately, the processes that enabled the Yugoslav and Chinese Communist Parties to seize power. Yet his analysis never answered the most fundamental question: what should Trotskyists actually do?

The quashing of the Goldman-Morrow tendency and the British RCP only led to the doubling down on a sterile course. In the SWP, Cannon's "Theses on the American Revolution" were adopted at the same convention that saw the final showdown with Morrow.

Stalinophobia and the "Third Camp"

In *Lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky warned: "The party which does not keep step with the historical tasks of its own class becomes, or runs the risk of becoming, the indirect tool of other classes." This is precisely what happened to the Fourth International between 1945 and 1948. Incapable of understanding that the task of the epoch was the struggle against the American empire in the Cold War, and unable to comprehend the source of Stalinist influence, the Fourth International's sterile method led it to frequently capitulate to the growing anti-Soviet offensive of the U.S.-led democratic-imperialist camp.

Pathfinder

Dick Coersen/ANP/Redux

Penta Springs Limited

From left: James P. Cannon, Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel.

First, already in 1946, the Fourth International raised the slogan for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe. In the context of U.S. encirclement, this completely misread the main line of battle. Wherever the Red Army withdrew—as in Iran and Austria—U.S. imperialism immediately stepped in. What this slogan ignored was also the deeply contradictory character of the Red Army. It was certainly used by the Soviet bureaucracy to commit

crimes against the working class, which had to be denounced. But as the armed fist of the Soviet Union, the Red Army also struck terror into the local capitalist classes. Demanding its unilateral withdrawal did not aid the development of revolutionary upheavals but would only have aided Western imperialism as well as local capitalists and reactionaries.

Second, in the trade unions, given the treachery and violence of Stalinists—which was very real—the interventions of Trotskyists often degenerated into opportunist blocs with "democratic," pro-imperialist elements. In France, the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI) maintained a bloc with the leadership of the Force Ouvrière union, an anti-communist split from the CP-led CGT union. In the U.S., the SWP repeatedly formed blocs with pro-Democratic Party bureaucrats against the CP during the Red Purges. This contributed to discrediting Trotskyists in the eyes of Communist workers, associating Trotskyists with anti-Soviet, pro-imperialist forces.

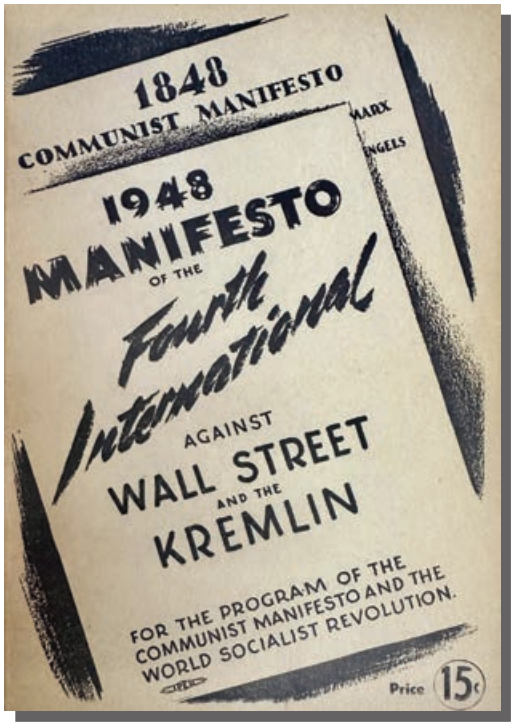
Third, the main manifesto of the 1948 Second World Congress was titled "Against Wall Street and the Kremlin." In the midst of the Cold War, this was a thoroughly "Third Campist" position, drawing an equal sign between U.S. imperialism and the USSR. While documents from the Congress maintained the position of defense of the USSR in general, they spoke of the Cold War in the most neutral terms. Under immense pressure from the democratic bourgeoisie, prominent internal currents—like the Johnson-Forest faction, Tony Cliff and even Natalia Sedova (Trotsky's widow)—were openly declaring that the USSR had now become "state capitalist" or "imperialist" and reneged on its defense.

Clinging to dogmas, the International spent the years leading up to 1948 claiming it was impossible for movements under Stalinist leadership to carry out any social overturn. In China, as Communist forces led by Mao were inflicting one defeat after another on the nationalist Guomindang, the Fourth International insisted that the CP was capable only of betrayal. Worse even, Chinese Trotskyists advocated a ceasefire in the civil war and actually opposed the victory of the Communist forces! In East Europe, as the ruling classes were systematically liquidated by the Red Army, the Fourth International doubled down on denying reality, insisting at the 1948 Congress that these states remained fully capitalist. The fear that accepting reality would lead to conciliating Stalinism was paralyzing the comrades.

For all these reasons, it is absurd to claim that the Fourth International was somehow "revolutionary" before the rise of "Pabloism" as we have argued in the past. And as Workers Power also argues, I should say. As the human material to build revolutionary parties was to be found inside the mass Stalinist and militant nationalist organizations, the Fourth International's sterile and Stalinophobic course only guaranteed its disorientation and isolation.

1948: The Year Everything Changed

A few weeks after the Second World Congress in 1948, the geopolitical ground shattered: Stalin publicly denounced Tito, the leader of the Yugoslav Communist Party. Up until then, the Trotskyist movement knew Stalinism only as a monolithic bloc controlled entirely by Moscow. Now, however, a mass Stalinist party was suddenly denouncing Stalin, borrowing language from Trotskyism, and bringing Yugoslavia to the center of world politics. This was a profound shock.



Manifesto of Second World Congress equates U.S. imperialism and USSR.

Moreover, a closer look at what had happened in Yugoslavia during and after the war revealed something quite extraordinary. While the Red Army had bureaucratically expropriated capitalism from above in East Europe, Yugoslavia's capitalism was smashed by a genuine mass uprising of workers and peasants—led by a Stalinist party, independently of Moscow. This was a second major shock, and one very difficult to understand or swallow for anyone clinging to sterile dogmas.

The shockwaves continued: a year later, in 1949, the Communist Party of China (CPC) marched into Beijing with Mao proclaiming the founding of the People's Republic of China. A mainly peasant army overthrew capitalism and unified the country after a century of humiliation and imperialist pillage. This was without a doubt the most consequential revolution in history, after the Russian Revolution. Yet the Fourth International's dogmatic predictions had been that the CPC could do nothing but betray, with our comrades on the ground left on the wrong side of history!

Soon after, in 1950, the Stalinist-led Korean People's Army advanced into South Korea, launching the Korean War and posing the extension of social revolution on the entire peninsula. This led to a direct clash between U.S. imperialism and the People's Republic of China. The American SWP flinched and failed to take the side of North Korea in the first few months of the war.

Despite being led by Stalinist forces, these transformations were monumental blows against imperialism and resounding victories for the oppressed. But they were also a theoretical catastrophe for the Fourth International. The movement found itself completely isolated from the revolutions of its era, unable to understand them. Worse still, these historic victories were being led by the very forces Trotskyists had written off for years as mere traitors. It was

this acute crisis that drove Michel Pablo to push for a sharp turn in the International—that is, "Pabloism."

What Is "Pabloism"?

In his famous 1951 document "Where Are We Going?", Michel Pablo argued that a global war between the imperialist camp and the Soviet bloc would soon break out. In the early 1950s, with the Korean War raging, this was not so far-fetched. Pablo characterized this impending conflict as a "War-Revolution," where the combined pressure of Western imperialism and the mobilization of the masses would force the Communist parties to fight for power—just as they had done in Yugoslavia or China. But this prediction itself was not what was really controversial in the International.

What ignited the explosive controversy were the conclusions Pablo drew. Believing the historical window was closing, he sought to sharply break from the previous course of Stalinophobia and pushed to get as close as possible to the mass Stalinist and nationalist parties, formalizing the tactic of *entrism sui generis*. This was entrism of a new kind: Trotskyists were to enter these mass organizations not for a swift, tactical maneuver to split them, but for a prolonged period, aiming to push forward the internal revolutionary development he believed was happening inside those parties.

Decades of factional mythology have totally confused this debate. To understand what happened next we have to pause, politically untangle this mess and ask honestly: what was right and what was wrong with Pablo's turn?

Pablo's Critics

I am going to do something quite dangerous and unprecedented here. I am going to defend Pablo on a number of points. It is essential to cut through the rigid dogmas of the traditional anti-Pablo camp, which our own tendency has, in some cases, repeated. Pablo was trying to grapple with real life; his fatal error was drawing non-revolutionary conclusions from it.

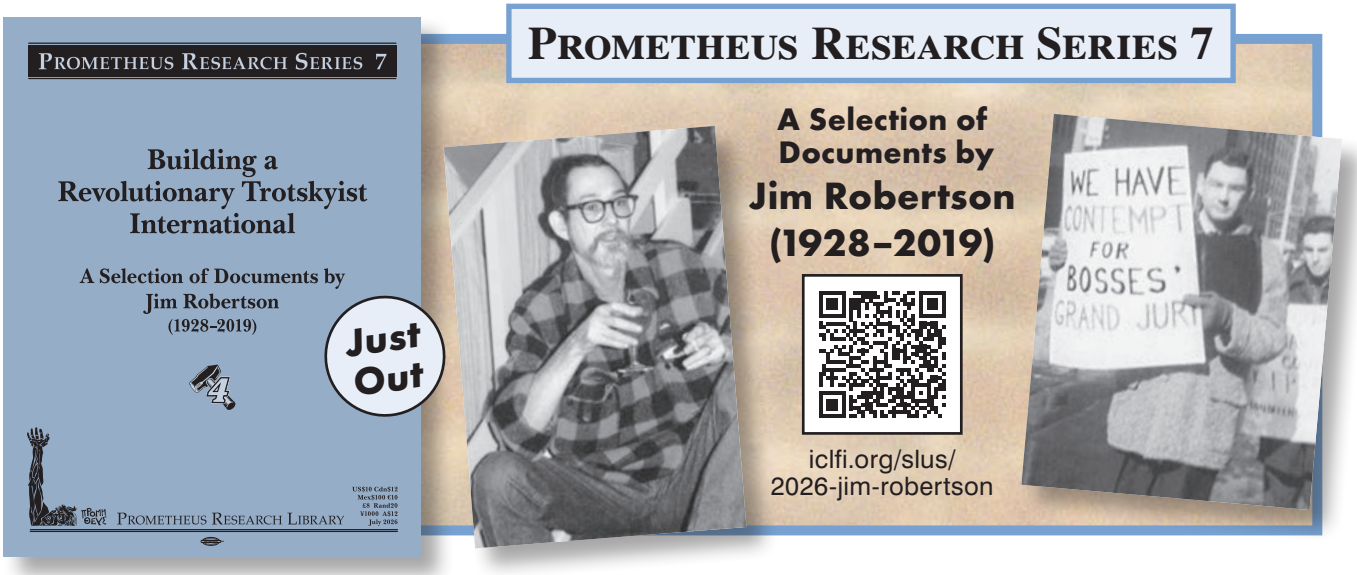
The "Theory of Blocs": The anti-Pabloites raised a hue and cry, denouncing Pablo for viewing the world through the prism of two camps—the imperialist camp led by the U.S. on the one hand, and the camp of the USSR and the colonial revolution. The anti-Pabloites claimed Pablo was erasing the fundamental class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class. This was a rigid, undialectical critique. During the Cold War, the global class struggle was objectively refracted through the concrete antagonism between U.S. imperialism and the Soviet bloc—just as today, it is refracted through the antagonism between the U.S. and China. This does not mean class struggle ceases to exist within these blocs. Social reality is made of multiple layers. But to deny that the world consisted of a struggle between the imperialist and Soviet camps in the name of a "pure" bourgeois-versus-worker line of battle leads immediately to "Third Campism," which always ends up capitulating to imperialism.

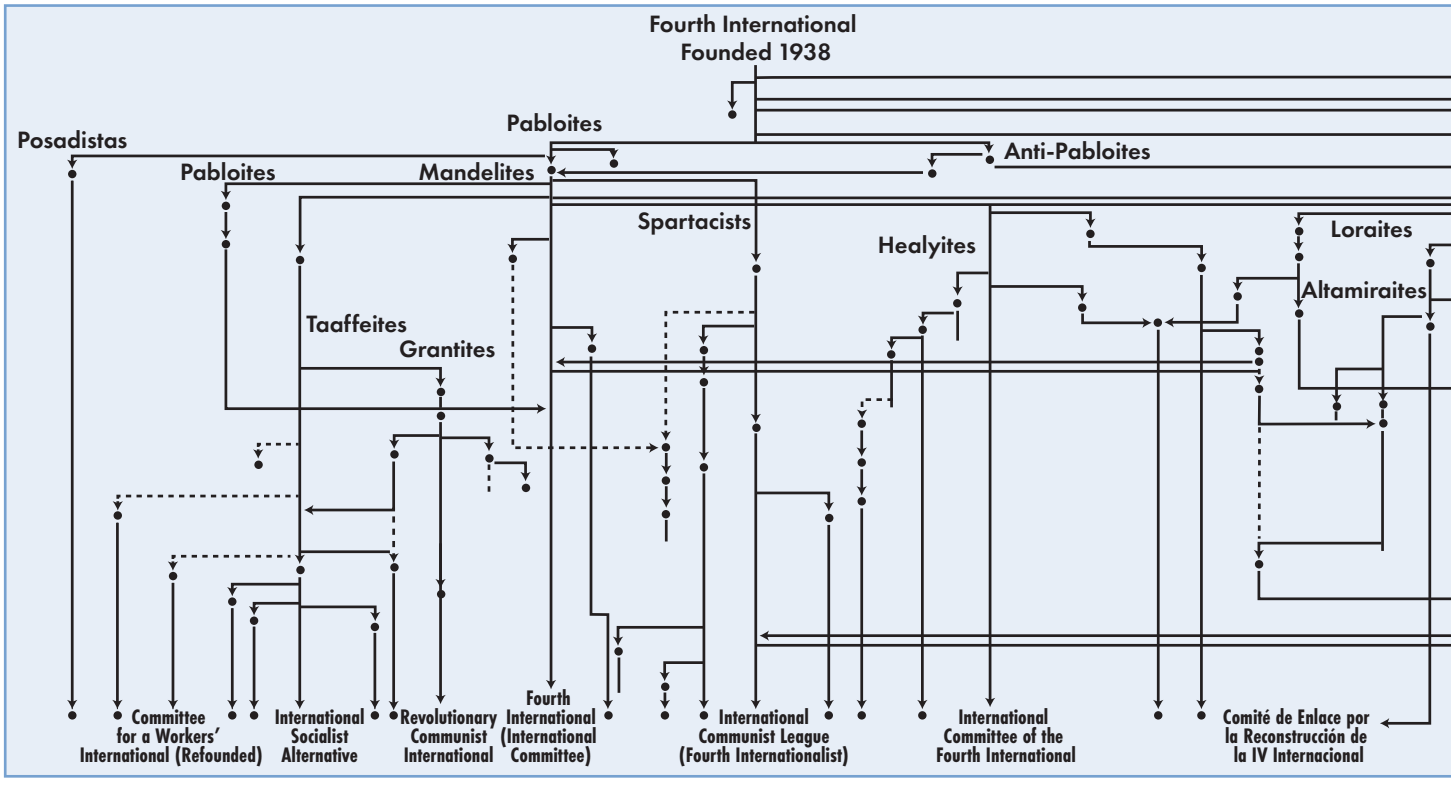
Alamy

Portraits of Stalin and Tito at postwar demonstration in Belgrade.

Centuries of Deformed Workers States: A lot of ink has been spilled about Pablo's famous quote:

> "in the whole historic period of the transition from capitalism to socialism, a period which can extend for centuries, we shall encounter a much more tortuous and complicated development of the revolution than our teachers foresaw—and workers' states that are not normal but necessarily quite deformed."
>
> —"On the Class Nature of Yugoslavia" (September 1949)





One can disagree with Pablo's specific timeline. And in writing it, he did lend the Stalinist bureaucracy a historically progressive role—a point I will return to. But Pablo was mainly highlighting that the transition from capitalism to socialism was proving to be far more complex than expected, producing revolutionary processes that did not fit perfectly within the established norms of October 1917. This was, and is, true. Pablo also argued that the victories of anti-capitalist revolutions, even if led by Stalinist parties, were deepening the internal crisis of Stalinism—which is also true.

Entrism Sui Generis: This was branded as the ultimate proof of liquidationism. But it was entirely correct for small propaganda groups to seek entry into mass Stalinist or nationalist organizations, even with a long-term perspective. Whether this is possible or how to do it depends on the concrete. But Pablo pushed this explicitly against the Stalinophobic course of the previous period—and the accusations of "liquidation" were often a mere defense of this. If the raw material of the vanguard was to be found inside the CPs or colonial liberation movements, while the Fourth International had only small forces, then it was vital to have a perspective to enter. The problem was not the tactic; it was the political justification for it.

The Nature of Stalinism: Many accused Pablo of revising the nature of Stalinism. He definitely did—but not always in the way the anti-Pabloites claimed. The SWP majority's main line of attack against Pabloites was the mantra: Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through. Workers Power, while claiming that both Pabloites and anti-Pabloites were wrong, also maintained that: "Wherever it occurs and whatever form it takes, Stalinist bureaucratic social revolutions are counterrevolutionary" (*The Degenerated Revolution*, 1982). Such formulations are not only disorienting. They are ***false***.

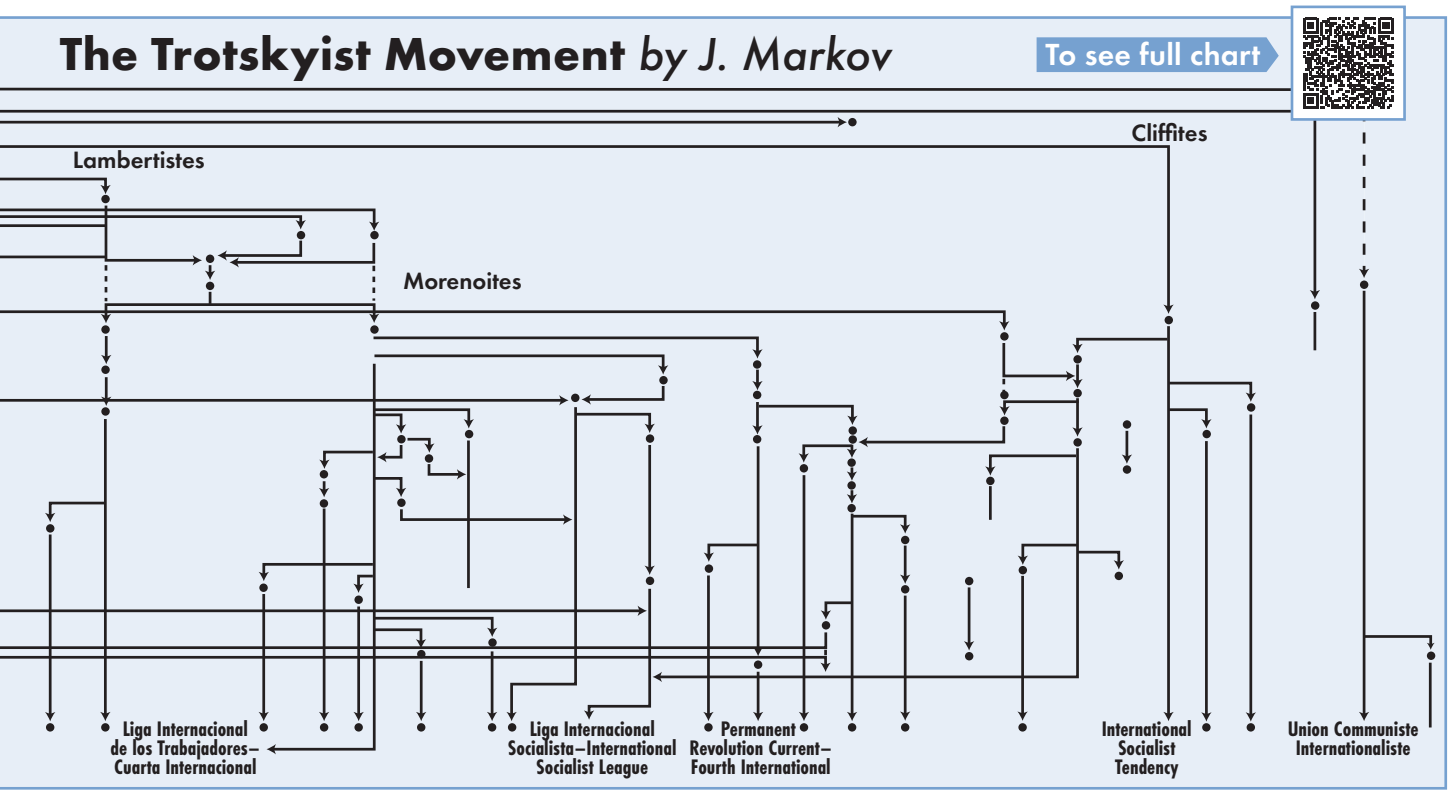
The smashing of a capitalist state, the destruction of landlordism, the expulsion of imperialism—even if carried out under bureaucratic control—is the opposite of counterrevolutionary! It is ***highly progressive***. Furthermore, in China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam and elsewhere, social revolutions were the product of powerful revolutionary upsurges of the masses, pushing Stalinist leaders to go way beyond what they wanted. While Pablo did prettify those forces, his opponents simply wrote off the deep, living contradictions within those movements. The labeling of social revolutions as "counterrevolutionary" was just a lazy way to sweep a problem away rather than solving it. It was also the surest way to guarantee the isolation and discrediting of Trotskyists.

Capitulating to Tito: Pablo certainly capitulated to Tito. So did Healy and Cannon. But critics who were quick to point this out, like Ted Grant (or our own later pamphlet on the question written by comrade Jan Norden), usually had no orientation to the Yugoslav revolution. Characterizing the Tito-Stalin split as a struggle between two bureaucracies—which it was—was often used as an excuse for abstention. Pablo was right to seek to influence the Yugoslav CP, including its upper layer, and send open letters. This was in the midst of a developing revolutionary situation, at a time when a bureaucracy was not totally consolidated. The issue was precisely what to say to the Yugoslav CP—which is what Pablo certainly got wrong.

More could be said. But the point I want to hammer is that Pablo wasn't just a chemically pure opportunist consciously seeking to destroy Trotskyism. His critics were often revising basic tenets of Trotskyism just as much.

What Is Wrong with Pabloism

So, what exactly was wrong with Pabloism? Since our reorientation, we are often accused of being neo-Pabloites.



But these accusations just show that the accusers do not understand what Pabloism actually is.

Pablo's entire analysis was based on the notion that "Communist Parties retain the possibility, ***in certain circumstances***, of roughly outlining a revolutionary orientation." In those situations, he argued, those parties would "cease to be strictly Stalinist parties." Here is the nub of revisionism that robbed Trotskyism of any *raison d'être*.

History has shown that, under certain specific conditions—a revolutionary uprising of the masses, huge pressure from imperialism, the weakness of the local bourgeoisie, etc.—Stalinist parties, and even petty-bourgeois nationalist organizations, can go way beyond the aims of their leadership, fight for power and even break with capitalism. This is without a doubt a revolutionary act. But it is ***not*** a "revolutionary orientation." This is an ambiguous formulation that was used by Pablo and others to basically argue that those Communist parties had become revolutionary.

The problem is the following: the seizure of power in one country does not complete the revolution, but only initiates it. As long as imperialism remains, the conquests of a single country continue to be subject to imperialist asphyxiation and the threat of reversal. Therefore, a revolutionary orientation can be nothing but a conscious strategy for ***world revolution***. This is what the early Comintern was built for.

And this is ***not*** the path the Chinese, Yugoslav or Korean Communist Parties were following. They did not "cease to be Stalinist Parties." Pablo reduced Stalinism to the following of orders from Moscow. This is not what Stalinism is fundamentally. Stalinism is the subordination of the world revolution to the building of socialism in one country, which leads to seeking an illusory peaceful coexistence with imperialism. It arises from the interests of a privileged layer, separated from the masses and caught between them and world imperialism.

Tito leaned on U.S. imperialism against the USSR, leading to his total capitulation in the face of the Korean War. The CPC's foreign policy was geared toward preserving the People's Republic of China ***at the expense*** of the world revolution, as seen with the huge pressure it put on the Vietnamese CP to accept partition in 1954 or its later betrayal of the Indonesian CP.

Of course, Pablo was correct to argue to support these revolutions. He was correct to argue that Trotskyists had to link themselves to the masses under Stalinist leadership, including through entry tactics. What was fatal in his tactics was that they were all motivated not by the need to build a revolutionary current within them, but by the illusion that the "objective process" would push Communist parties to become revolutionary. This notion was then quickly extended to all sorts of forces, from the MNR in Bolivia, to Ben Bella in Algeria and even to the left wing of the Labour Party!

This raised the awkward question: what was the point of Trotskyism then? If Tito and Mao had basically projected a "revolutionary orientation," if other CPs would do the same, or even nationalist formations, what would be our difference with them?

What the Fourth International often tried to raise was workers democracy and the legalization of Trotskyist parties. But the slogan for workers democracy alone is ***not*** a fundamental counterposition to Stalinism, nor is it a historical justification for a separate tendency of the communist movement. The same is true in the trade unions. The demand for workers democracy, while crucial, acquires a revolutionary significance only as part of a broader internationalist strategy. The fundamental reason a bureaucracy cannot tolerate the free expression of the working class is that it seeks to maintain its privileges, as well as to

Sovfoto

Alamy

Left: Chinese and Korean soldiers celebrate after defeating an attack by U.S. forces, Korea, 1953. Right: Mao Zedong proclaims the founding of the People's Republic of China, 1949. The Chinese Revolution deeply disoriented Trotskyists.

conciliate imperialism at the expense of the working class. Let me quote someone:

> "The historical justification for our movement does not reside in the fact that it is more democratic than Stalinism, that it makes the revolution with less overhead expenses or that it is alone capable of constructing a socialist society. Its only possible justification, confirmed by three dramatic decades, resides in the incapacity of Stalinism to overturn ***world*** capitalism…."

These words are from Ernest Mandel in his famous 1951 "Ten Theses." They are absolutely correct! But they were used to defend Pablo's course of support to Tito and Mao, who had "ceased to be Stalinists"!

The whole problem boils down to the fact that Trotskyism had no fundamental answer to Stalinism as it existed in the postwar period. Thus, it couldn't make any decisive contributions to the revolutionary movement.

And, once again, we are back to the point I have been making throughout. ***The task of the era was to defeat the American empire***. The only coherent way the Fourth International could challenge Tito, Mao, all the CPs and the nationalist leaders was on the terrain of the ***world revolution***. This isn't an abstraction. It meant developing a serious strategy that sought to defend the workers states based on the intensification of the class struggle abroad against imperialism. And from this standpoint denounce the CPs' accommodation to imperialism as well as their narrow and nationalist strategies to defend the revolutions at the expense of workers, national minorities and the international proletariat.

This was the only path to undermine the bureaucracy, build a genuine communist current and prepare the political revolution. And it was the only path offering the Trotskyist movement a real coherence and historical role: ***by positioning it as the most consistent anti-imperialist faction of the communist movement, in the world struggle against the U.S. empire***.

The 1953 Split

Obviously, this is not what the anti-Pabloite forces argued. In France, the PCI majority under Marcel Bleibtreu was the first to fight Pablo. They attacked him on dozens of points yet on the core strategic error they agreed. The French majority explicitly argued that the Communist Party of China had ceased to be Stalinist and ridiculed the idea of "Stalinism without Stalin." What they really opposed was the immediate, practical perspective of entry into the French Communist Party—an organizational diktat that Pablo did impose on them in a bureaucratic manner leading to the PCI majority's exclusion.

In the U.S., the split in 1953 developed along different yet equally disoriented lines. The Cochran-Clarke minority fully embraced Pablo's objectivist ideas, while at the same time opposing the Stalinophobia of Cannon's leadership and trying to grapple with the real challenges posed by the McCarthyite period. In response, the SWP majority doubled down on a rigid orthodoxy. They defended Cannon's 1946 "Theses on the American Revolution" as an almost mystical text, and, as I mentioned, waged an internal war under the banner that Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through. This fight only deepened the SWP's disorientation. And right after the minority's expulsion, the SWP quit the Fourth International without even bothering to fight within it!

The American, British and French sections would go on to form the International Committee. Our tendency has claimed that they represented the revolutionary continuity—albeit with a heavy dose of criticism, to be fair. But the truth is that the International Committee was equally incapable of offering a Marxist response to the fundamental questions of our movement.

While Pablo openly tailed Stalinist and nationalist movements, the International Committee retreated into a thoroughly sectarian, sterile, and reality-denying approach to those same movements. It later denied that a revolution had happened in Cuba! And one of the most damning indictments of this split was its geography. By 1953, the majority of the Fourth International's membership was likely located in the colonial and semicolonial world—across Latin America and Asia. However, except for the Chinese exile group, no other sections outside the imperialist countries went with the International Committee at the time of the split.

And this is the tragedy of the 1953 fracture. The Trotskyist movement split into two broken halves, neither of which

ICL's Response to October 7
A Critical Re-evaluation

The following motion was passed at our international conference.

In seeking to criticize the strategy of the Palestinian resistance during October 7, the leaflet "A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation" (10 October 2023) made a series of inflammatory declarations, best encapsulated in the kicker: "Only Death and Defeat with Hamas." This made it appear to the movement that we were siding with the Zionist propaganda offensive, which was in full force at the time. Expressions characterizing Hamas as "fanatic Islamist butchers" and their strategy as "strapping a suicide vest on all of Gaza" were particularly provocative in this context.

Although the political arguments against Hamas's strategy made in the article were themselves sound—and have been vindicated—even the best arguments amount to nothing if they are written in a way that alienates the oppressed they seek to speak to. The article was completely at odds with the sentiment of the Palestinian masses—who saw October 7 as a defiant act of resistance—the consequence being that our correct warnings against Hamas's disastrous strategy fell on deaf ears.

In particular, in the context of the universal condemnation of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, the article did not even make the elementary point that the targeting of the Israeli military was legitimate, in contradistinction to the targeting of unarmed civilians.

This article was defended for years following its publication despite both internal and external criticism and republished in our theoretical journal, *Spartacist* No. 69, in August 2024. Our defensiveness in the face of criticism, and the impulse behind the initial article, were in large part driven by the fact that much of the left was either uncritical of Hamas or refusing to put forward a political alternative to its nationalist strategy.

While our intervention in the Palestinian movement evolved in the course of the genocide as we developed our political understanding of the Palestinian liberation struggle, this first article, published during the opening shots of the genocide of the Palestinian people, was a stain on our otherwise principled intervention.

could offer a coherent, revolutionary answer to Stalinist and nationalist forces in the fight to defeat the American empire.

Conclusion

I will briefly conclude. Some comrades might wonder: yes, what you are saying seems correct, but would it have made a difference? Even with the best program, weren't the Trotskyists facing an impossible situation, tiny in the face of huge Stalinist and nationalist forces?

A program isn't a magic wand. That said, the easiest thing one can do in politics is to underestimate the power of a correct orientation, one which actually corresponds to the historical process. If the Fourth International had understood its task, it would at least have given it a political purpose and coherence. It would not have turned it immediately into a mass movement. But so many disorienting and destructive fights could have been avoided, and huge openings could have been exploited. And crucially, by the mid 1950s, when dissatisfaction with Stalinism was growing, thousands would have found a solid and coherent movement to rally to.

The ultimate lesson of this history is that a movement without a correct compass is doomed. Fundamentally, the Fourth International disintegrated because it failed to grasp that the central task of the era was the fight against the American empire. And today, the vast majority of the Trotskyist movement repeats the exact same error—labeling China as "imperialist" just as the American empire sows war and destruction to the four corners of the globe. And on the other side, many fighters in the Global South think that the Communist Party of China—which has only enabled the U.S. offensive and demoralized the working class—is genuinely revolutionary. These are the very questions which broke the Fourth International!

The task of revolutionaries today consists precisely in providing a revolutionary answer to this polarization, in forging the kind of revolutionary synthesis which our forebears didn't. The task lies in building a revolutionary current which can say: ***With China against the U.S.! With the world proletariat against the CPC bureaucracy's betrayals!***

This is how we can give a renewed and deeper meaning to our slogan: ***Reforge the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution!*** ■

Alamy

Diego Rivera 1934 mural "Man, Controller of the Universe."

EUROPE

Reaction & Impotence

Composite: Ñico Connelly

The following presentation, by comrade Philipp Clyde, was delivered as part of a panel on different regions of the world at our Ninth International Conference.

Impotence Squared

After Trump became president, the leaders of the most powerful European imperialist countries—Germany, France and Britain—declared themselves to be the "coalition of the willing" to ensure Ukraine would win the war. But willingness is one thing, being capable another. In all three countries we see a ***deep political crisis*** developing in the face of an ***upsurge of the right***. Already in Britain we have Starmer 2.0: Andy Burnham in government with Farage waiting in the wings. Macron is on his way out, and Chancellor Merz is hanging by a thread in what is already the most unpopular German government in postwar history.

To begin with, let's remember: who created a unified Europe and for what purpose? It was ***the U.S.*** that united capitalist Western Europe against the Soviet Union, integrating powers like Germany and France—sworn enemies for centuries—under the U.S. umbrella. Following capitalist restoration, the U.S. overlord designed the EU as just the right tool for the period of globalization in the 1990s and 2000s. And today, again, it is ***the U.S.*** that is pushing to overhaul the whole political architecture of Europe to serve ***its*** interests.

U.S. imperialism needs a different Europe now: not a liberal one that raises the rainbow flag and promotes free trade to plunder the world, while the U.S. loses out economically and shoulders all the military spending. Rather, U.S. imperialism needs a heavily armed lieutenant that represses workers and oppressed nations without qualms and ensures Europe stays in line with its strategic objective of subduing China.

This is the reason the U.S. is pushing for higher military spending from the European capitalists. From a formalistic perspective, this seems strange: ***why*** would the strongest imperialist power demand its weaker rivals build up their militaries? Of course, as class strategists, the U.S. rulers know that Germany fighting for world domination is absolutely not on the agenda now, and not in the foreseeable future either.

Merz and Macron want to present their arms spending as strategic autonomy. But let's be clear: overwhelmingly, this arming of Europe means paying the Americans. Last week, Merz was so happy to announce that the U.S. finally allowed Germany to buy millions worth of Tomahawk cruise missiles! The U.S. is using NATO to squeeze its allies. Yes, the European imperialists are strengthening their own arms industries—but ***not*** to challenge the U.S. They are shouldering more of the costs of maintaining imperialist control over the world, with the U.S. calling the shots.

We talk a lot about the decline of the U.S. True. But we also need to be conscious of how ***decrepit*** the Western European powers are. Germany still has somewhat more

industry, but Germany, Britain, France—they are all economically and militarily completely dependent on the U.S.: on U.S.-controlled payment systems, U.S. weapons and, when they build weapons themselves, they need U.S. technology to make them work.

In this situation, it does not help for Marxists to throw around Lenin quotes about interimperialist rivalry. No. We need to be concrete: in order to defend Iran in Germany, you have to mobilize workers against the massive Ramstein U.S. Air Force base! In order to fight militarization and the reintroduction of the draft in Germany, you have to oppose the U.S.-dominated NATO that is behind this. We see that a proletarian struggle against the U.S. empire is, in fact, not a "capitulation" to German imperialism, but part and parcel of opposing it.

The Working Class Turns Right, the Left Clings to Liberalism

As Trump is putting the squeeze on, key elements of the ruling classes in Europe are moving to bring down the liberal consensus of previous decades. But not only the capitalists. More and more ***workers*** are looking to the right. Whether Le Pen in France or the AfD in Germany, rightist parties have the most support among workers.

Germany is, in many ways, becoming the focal point of the rightward shift in Europe. For years, Germany was the poster boy for peaceful, progressive globalization. No large-scale wars and, by the mid-2000s, Germany was the world champion of exports, sucking the lifeblood from workers via trade. Those times are gone. The German imperialists' business model is getting squeezed on all sides, by being cut off from cheap Russian energy, U.S. tariffs and the Chinese industrial juggernaut. This leaves the German capitalists no choice but to attack the working class and destroy their own industrial base. Deindustrialization is accelerating in the two core components of German industry: chemical and automotive. Thus, VW just announced a plan to cut 100,000 workers internationally.

For decades it was the SPD, with the support and cover of union bureaucrats, and the Left Party that pushed through attacks on workers. This produced a horrific downward spiral: unions have massively lost members, the left is more and more discredited and the AfD appears as the one forceful anti-Establishment party.

The one hope propagated by the Left Party is the anti-AfD popular front, the *Brandmauer* ("firewall"). The Left Party recently announced it would support a CDU government to keep the AfD out...and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany, disastrously, approved of this! Of course, for leftists to cling to capitalist politicians as a barrier to the right wing is already an admission of their own complete impotence. The left has clung to liberalism for decades; now they do not want to see the results of this complete dead end.

Our first key task is fighting to strengthen workers' ***defensive position*** against the coming attacks. A crucial element of this is to wage a hard fight within the left to face reality squarely and open leftists' eyes to the complete bankruptcy of the liberal politics that has driven many workers to the right.

Whether in the coming presidential elections in France or in Germany, we need to fight to ***break*** the anti-right-wing popular fronts on a ***class basis***—not by simply proclaiming how bad class collaboration is, but through concrete proposals for struggles that can overcome divisions in the working class. One example is our initiative in France for a united Trotskyist campaign that exploits Mélenchon's contradictions by pushing forward his most left-wing positions in order to expose him and break his hegemony over the left. In Germany, we seek to build an anti-NATO current in the workers movement in opposition to the Left Party leadership.

Kostiantyn Liberov/Libkos

Funeral ceremony for Ukrainian soldiers, Kharkiv, January 8.

Ukraine War: Only Proletarian Unity Can Vanquish Imperialism

I have to talk about the Ukraine war: this will be ***decisive*** for Europe. We might have thought Russia's victory would come sooner, but the fundamental dynamics of the situation are clear. Russia is slowly grinding down the Ukrainian army, while Ukraine, being pushed into a corner, looks like it is entering a more protracted political crisis. In fact, Ukraine's developing military defeat leads it to rely ***more*** on the imperialists and make ***more*** wild attacks on Moscow and Crimea. The whole situation underlines with full force that, under the current regime, Ukrainian sovereignty is being completely sold out to NATO and that, on Ukraine's side, the war is being waged to be more subjugated to NATO. This is in fact what support to Ukraine in the war means.

Yes, obviously Ukraine's sovereignty and freedom are under attack from Russia. But the Ukrainian government's current prosecution of the war, acting as a NATO pawn, ensures maximum enmity from the Russian population and in fact ***undermines and endangers*** the fight for Ukrainian freedom. As we have insisted from the beginning: in this situation, communists must reject support to either Ukraine or Russia. We must fight for Ukrainian freedom through a ***break*** with the Ukrainian government's whole NATO strategy. At the same time, we need to expose how Putin's invading Ukraine, purportedly in defense of Russia against NATO, in fact plays into the hands of the imperialists and ***weakens*** the fight against NATO. Only in this way can we motivate a common revolutionary, proletarian and anti-imperialist strategy that can unite the workers of the region against U.S. imperialism and NATO.■

CHINA

"The Situation should be ~~is~~ Excellent"

This presentation, edited for publication, was given by comrade Qimin at our Ninth International Conference.

Everything under heaven is in chaos. The situation should be excellent. Yet it is not. This report aims to address precisely this question: How is it that the People's Republic of China, the world's biggest industrial power, technologically on a par with and even surpassing the U.S. empire, appears entirely passive on the world scene? What does this contradiction tell us about the Communist Party of China (CPC), its program and the road to China's continued development? How does the turning point in the world situation relate to what is happening within China itself?

CFOTO/Future Publishing (top photo); VCG

Top photo: Solar panels cover hills in Shandong Province. Above: Robots perform martial arts at Beijing Spring Festival in February.

A Two-Faced Strategy

As Trotsky said, the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership. Where this is most evident is within the largest organized working class on Planet Earth, in China. The ***main*** contradiction that the entire world situation hinges upon is precisely the class balance of forces in China. This is also what creates the two-faced strategy of the CPC.

On one hand, there is the immense pressure to keep the U.S. system stable. This explains China's call to open the Strait of Hormuz. This explains its criminal abandonment of Cuba and Venezuela, and the massive reduction in oil purchasing that kept stock markets stable while Trump bombed Tehran. China's non-presence on the world stage is tied to the capitalist and market sectors of the economy and the massive integration of the CPC bureaucracy at the highest levels with the U.S. dollar order, including through personal corruption, but also its interest in keeping social stability.

On the other hand, the CPC bureaucrats' power rests upon the social foundations of the 1949 Revolution. Their legitimacy rests upon the promise that China will never again suffer a century of humiliation. They know that the aim of imperialism is to keep China subjugated. This is what forces them to drive the development of the country. That the CPC itself has 100 million members, including proletarian cadres, requires it to respond to this class pressure.

The bureaucracy very much self-consciously expresses this contradiction. This is ***why*** it abandons its allies, and defends free trade but uses its massive state power to defend the free-trade order. Its current strategy on the world stage has been to stabilize the global economy, while the current Five-Year Plan doubles down on technological and national autarky. The Politburo is not stupid in that they know that a crash is coming and that China could face a blockade. Huge stockpiles of grain and fuel and gigantic bailout funds are being prepared. The problem is that their very material basis and program ***prevent*** them from actively fighting to break out of this encirclement through proletarian internationalism. They are stuck with purely responding while the U.S. has the initiative. That's because the U.S. rulers are defending their own system: imperialism.

China's Rise and U.S. Hegemony

The contradiction between these two pressures could be smoothed over as long as the global economy continued to expand. Globalization brought new buyers for Chinese goods, foreign investment and relative political calm outside of a few U.S. interventions. The Chinese capitalists would

submit to CPC diktats, and the Chinese working class was kept pacified, as long as the economy grew at double digits, real wages increased and eye-watering speculative profits were made in the housing bubble.

It is China's own rise that is now tipping the U.S. world order to its limits and thus putting this basic social contract at home in jeopardy. Let me be fully clear: China climbing the value chain, denying the imperialists their profits in key sectors like auto and AI, and gaining technologies to defend itself and develop the economy is progressive. The problem is the CPC's strategy, caught between a rock and a hard place, in response to their own newfound power.

Look at the trajectory in China over the last few years. The bureaucracy has already begun to turn "left," in its own nationalist, repressive way that runs roughshod over the masses. The property bubble represented a gigantic cancer, creating a massive class of speculators—not even capitalists but speculators—who are parking hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars abroad. Massive capital flight. They popped this bubble because it represented a capitalist threat. The state banks then started lending like crazy toward technological upgrading and advanced industry.

This much-needed move, however, was done in a way that also trampled the masses. 60% of Chinese household wealth is in property. Almost everyone owns a home. Wiping out $18 trillion worth of valuation meant that consumption crashed. Local governments, which depend on land sales but also provide basic education and public transport, have had to impose severe austerity. The ***center*** wants to stop the wanton corruption of local governments. But the mountains are tall and the emperor is far away. So, the only method they have is the blunt tool of financial starvation.

Just to illustrate what else they're doing. Unused housing converted into social housing. But what else? A ***planned***, ***targeted*** raising of the Chinese stock market so that household wealth is gradually rolled over into stocks. What kind of stock market has ***targets***? One of the few wonders of the socialist market economy.

The deeper problem, however, is that China's economy is completely ***unbalanced*** in its development. Its population, too, is completely stratified between several hundred million migrant workers and the skilled urban workforce. This is how you can have an economy that is both racing ahead, with productivity in automated auto factories ***double*** that of the U.S., ***and*** hundreds of millions of people still working in low-end export sectors, agriculture, mining and steel. The rapid pace of industrial automation is quickly ballooning the gig sector—to 84 million workers—which is so socially volatile that the CPC is now actively ordering the unionization of the sector.

A Forced March

The CPC's strategy is a forced march to socialist modernization, i.e., technologically outcompeting the imperialists. They pour billions into semiconductors; every province is supposed to have its own EV, AI and solar sectors. This is at the expense of modernizing the backward sectors of the economy, or of improving the consumption and welfare of the masses. The state is able to spend so much precisely because China has one of the highest savings rates on the planet, the consequence of a system which actively denies rural workers education and healthcare.

Xinhua

Xu Jiayin, former Evergrande real estate tycoon, sentenced to life in prison, August 20. Justice done, but what about his enablers?

This has been the basic model since Reform and Opening Up: the peasantry are now allowed freedom of movement (unlike the Mao period), but they are not allowed residential rights in the cities, their children cannot be educated in urban schools, and a plot of land guaranteed to them by the state is used to cover the costs of child-rearing and pensions. Economic development has granted limited reforms, but the fundamental model remains. Thus, you have a several hundred million member strata of migrant workers, who could work for extremely cheap, attracting Western and Japanese capital.

Unlike the West and Japan, China's rapid leap into industrialization did not involve acquiring colonies or imperial expansion. What this meant was that the country necessarily had to exploit ***itself*** in order to obtain the capital needed.

Now this fundamental stratification maintains itself even as the CPC adopts a new strategy—that of technological autarky. The Five-Year Plan speaks of "whole industrial chains"—that is, their solution to the encirclement of China is to literally reproduce the entire global economy within one country. Thus, the estimated 67 million left-behind children of migrant workers become generationally trapped as the lowest tier in the CPC's strategy to build socialism in one country.

The reactionary peasant family serves as the shock absorber for when crisis hits. This is why all these reports on *hukou* reform and consumption spending are only marginal. They do not change the fact that there remains gigantic inequality in distribution between rural and urban workers. Urban workers also hold desperately onto their privileges for fear that equalization means equalized poverty. The point is that you cannot just administratively abolish this *hukou* stratification. Like a tier question in a trade union, we have to fight for raising ***all*** workers to the welfare received in Shanghai and Beijing. This can only be done by squeezing the capitalists and ***fighting to break the imperialist encirclement of China***.

This is how we get to the funny conundrum of the IMF demanding that China establish a welfare state, while Xi Jinping says that welfare breeds "lazy people." We should be very clear—the imperialists want China to "raise welfare" by adopting a market economy. The imperialists want this to cripple China's industrial upgrading. They want Chinese workers buying Volkswagens, not BYDs.

The other reason the bureaucracy doesn't want to do it is that the CPC is haunted by the Brezhnev period of stagnation in the USSR. They see the chief mistake as granting welfare to workers that then could not be taken back without sparking a proletarian uprising threatening their bureaucratic rule.

For Socialist Globalization!

Our response to this is simple. They forget that the working class would be willing to sacrifice its own amenities if it had a clear and conscious understanding of its task, and if that decision was made not by fat-cat bureaucrats but by themselves. Socialism cannot be defended by "wise" men with supercomputers. It is defended through the conscious participation of billions.

So, what is the proletarian internationalist program to resolve this contradiction in China's development? It is to say: the world revolution and China's domestic development are fused. They are the same strategic task. ***Neither the snail's pace of a "consumer" economy nor the forced march to socialist modernization!***

This was Trotsky's basic point in *The Third International After Lenin*—you have to use the global division of labor. Wages and consumption in China can be raised without reducing the rate of industrial accumulation—by importing cheap goods from the global market. Let go of basic manufacturing, transfer this to the Global South and use the export of Chinese industrialization to advance ***socialist globalization!***

The CPC is not the cash-strapped Soviet Union or the DDR [East Germany] that had to sell its own citizens' blood for dollars. We are talking about the country with one of the biggest piles of U.S. dollars on Planet Earth. The bureaucracy keeps this hoard because they need it to defend their rule during a crisis. We would instead use the money to offer massive technical and industrial aid to the world's workers and oppressed in order to, ultimately, establish a belt and road of workers states that will prevent China from being blockaded by the imperialists. Instead, the CPC's strategy is to curry favor with the current bourgeois regimes in the Global South, exporting surveillance equipment and aiding in the repression of workers and peasants.

The current global economic order is untenable. China's productive forces are a mortal threat to the imperialists. This is why they have begun a death spiral of deglobalization. So where will the bureaucracy go? Because it lacks a global revolutionary perspective, it will instead double down on a nationalist, technological autarky. This will be a strike against ***both*** capital ***and*** the masses. It will mean more in-state measures—particularly if the imperialists really attempt to close the world economy to China. Such a move will look very much like the fortress built during the Covid lockdowns. Smashing capital, repression against the social freedom of the masses. But also technological wonders that allowed China to emerge with new productive forces. This will also be extremely brittle! Look at how the uprising of Foxconn workers during the lockdown, alongside the street protests, led the bureaucracy to completely reverse course.

The reality is that such a move would be socially explosive. It would mean closing in the capitalists at home. An economy shuttered from the imperialists would also create massive social instability in the West. You have a generation in China that has had unprecedented economic growth for 30 years, that has had certain individual and social freedoms. To clamp down on this in a society far richer than the Soviet Union in 1927 will present an almost civil-war-like scenario.

To fight for the People's Republic to use its strength in the service of the world revolution, to cohere a left anti-imperialist opposition both inside and outside the CPC, we must confront the immediate illusions.

The first is pacifism, and it runs deep. Grueling work in the factories—whether for Western capital or Chinese—still looks better than sending an only son or daughter to die on a battlefield. The masses do not want World War III, and the hardliners who demand military confrontation offer it on a nationalist basis that would alienate the very proletariat of the area China needs on its side. But this is a false choice.

The CPC's power to cripple U.S. military production and to pour investment into oppressed countries can freeze the imperialist assault without a single ICBM leaving its silo. But the sabotage is political, too: Beijing still counsels the Cuban Communists to adopt market reforms that now amount to surrender, and still presses the Palestinian resistance into unity with the Zionist quislings of Fatah—the very method, dictated by Stalin, that the CPC itself had to break from to make its own revolution.

The second illusion is economic objectivism: faith that the baggage train of cheap Chinese goods will cripple the imperialists all on its own. It is a seductive idea—one look at high-speed rail projects in Britain or California tells you what the imperialists' "industrial prowess" is worth. But goods alone will not do it. Socialism can only be consciously constructed. The most important point is that the CPC itself is internally contradictory. So is its Belt and Road Initiative, when it builds solar panels that fuel American military bases in Mindanao.

These illusions must be smashed because they are what justifies China's inaction in the defense of oppressed nations. To prepare for a future blockade while granting the imperialists a free hand will ultimately atomize the masses. They are the only ones we can count on in the defense of the 1949 Revolution. Xi Jinping said that the USSR fell because no one was "man enough" to defend it in its dire hour. But his strategy is precisely going to destroy the only force—the conscious socialist proletariat—capable of preventing counterrevolution. ■

MYANMAR
A Chinese Neocolony?

Manan Vatsyayana/AFP

Huang Jingwen/Xinhua

You don't have to be imperialist to be reactionary. Xi Jinping with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing, whose country is a major source of rare earth minerals for China.

We print below an excerpt from a conference presentation on Southeast Asia by comrade Elizabeth Johnson.

Myanmar is one of the main examples socialist organizations use when they want to argue that the People's Republic of China is an imperialist power.

To give some context: Myanmar's borders were established when the country was a British colony. It's a prison house of peoples, inhabited by over 100 ethnic groups speaking different languages and practicing different religions, including the descendants of South Asians who were recruited by the British to act as a labor and police force. The dominant ethnic group, the Burmese, comprises about two-thirds of the population.

A brief neoliberal interlude in the early 21st century, symbolized by pro-imperialist democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, produced explosive economic growth but also widening inequality and a rapid increase in foreign ownership. This provoked a nationalist backlash, leading to anti-Muslim pogroms, the rise of ethnic militias and a military coup. The junta closed off the country, took control of the economy and massively repressed the democracy movement. In response, the democracy movement constituted itself as the National Unity Government (NUG), declared war and formed the People's Defence Force as its military wing.

There are now an estimated 1,200 armed factions fighting in Myanmar. The junta controls about 20% of the country, the NUG about 40%, and most of the rest is held by various ethnic militias. The economy has broken down, with the poverty rate estimated at 50% and more than half the country's children no longer attending school. There has been a mass exodus from junta-controlled areas as youth flee conscription. To compensate for the weakness of its ground forces, the junta relies heavily on airstrikes and Chinese drones, targeting hospitals, schools and infrastructure in rebel territory.

So what are the PRC's interests here? One is resources: over half of China's heavy rare earth imports come from Myanmar. China also has a geostrategic interest in overland access to the Indian Ocean, bypassing the chokehold at the Strait of Malacca. To this end, it has been developing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, a network of transport, energy and industrial projects linking China's Yunnan Province to a deep sea port in the Bay of Bengal.

We all know that imperialism is dependent on military force, so what is China's military role in Myanmar? The PLA carries out border patrols—but that's on the Chinese side of the border, to keep the warring factions out. Reportedly on pipelines and other infrastructure, there are Chinese security guards, not PLA soldiers. The fact is that China is not attempting to impose military control on Myanmar.

China's main role in the civil war is arming forces that are fighting on opposite sides. On one hand, the CPC arms the junta to stop the chaos in the ethnic Burmese heartland, and on the other it arms the ethnic militias to maintain order along the Chinese border. The CPC has attempted to build good relations with the NUG, trying to win it away from U.S. influence. It is even calling on members of the U.S.-controlled ASEAN alliance to intervene to stop the civil war. Why is the PRC's policy so crazy? It's because China is not trying to dominate Myanmar. Instead, it's trying to find some other force that can stabilize the country.

Before Trump was re-elected, U.S. policy was to let Myanmar self-destruct as a barrier to Chinese influence. Now that rare earth minerals are a major focus of strategic rivalry, the White House and ASEAN are rebuilding ties with the junta, seeking to bring it into the U.S. camp. For its part, the CPC's Myanmar strategy depends on buying the loyalty of the junta and the warlords, not on making an alliance with the country's oppressed masses. The CPC's conservative, bureaucratic outlook is an obstacle both to the defense of China's interests and to social progress in Myanmar.

China is playing a plenty reactionary role in this conflict. By supporting the junta, it is trampling on the democratic aspirations of the Burmese majority and the national sensibilities of the ethnic minorities. The policies the CPC is pursuing are contradictory and conservative. But Myanmar is not a Chinese neocolony.■

Atta Kenare/AFP

Ruins of Shajareh Tayyebeh school in Minab, Iran, bombed by U.S. in February. More than 150 were killed, including 120 children.

IRAN WAR
Prospects & Tasks

This presentation, edited for publication, was given by comrade Badr of the ISA-R at our Ninth International Conference.

The goal of my report today will be to explain the current dynamics of the region, why the Axis of Resistance's strategy is still set to fail, and lay a basis for how communists would put forward an alternative program.

There are a few things that I cannot cover today, but which are quite essential for developing a communist program for the Middle East: namely, the legacy of the Arab Spring and the dynamic of class struggles within the industrial centers of the Middle East—Egypt, Türkiye and Iran. However, due to both the time constraints and the wide geographical scope of the U.S. and Israel's war, I will only be focusing on the question of Iran's strategy of resistance, its network of allies and dynamics in the Levant.

History of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Before looking at the current war, it's worth looking at the history of the Islamic Republic and its attitude towards U.S. imperialism to know how we got to where we are today.

The Islamic Revolution was always a contradiction. One of the main banners of the new regime was opposition to the U.S., but there was also opposition to communism. This meant that the methods of resisting the U.S. would come at the expense of the independent action of the working class and peoples of the region. While the regime became isolated from the world economy, it was forced into left-nationalist-type reforms—nationalizations, state intervention, provision of public services, etc. At the same time, it was waging a reactionary war against Iraq, while massacring the communist movement, also with the blessing of the imperialists.

After the end of the war and the destruction of the workers movement, the regime did not move back towards its anti-U.S. orientation—the opposite. In combination with neoliberal reforms and privatization, the 1990s and early 2000s were an era of détente between the U.S. and Iran.

But despite the Iranian regime making continued overtures towards reconciliation with the U.S., the U.S. would not accept anything but a full return of U.S. control over Iran. However, even though Bush Jr. declared Iran a node in the "Axis of Evil," Iran-backed militias in Iraq were still collaborating with the U.S. occupation by fighting Al Qaeda, and simultaneously using anti-Sunni militias to fight the U.S. coalition. When the U.S. started imposing sanctions on Iran because of its nuclear program, the regime further ramped up its anti-U.S. rhetoric, prompting a further escalation of the U.S. sanctions regime.

"End" of Strategic Patience and the Current War

What guided Iran's new orientation towards resistance was its doctrine of "strategic patience." This meant allow-

ing the U.S. to escalate its sanctions regime and encircling of Iran, while Iran would build an autarkic and militarized economy, fund regional militias and hope that an overextension of the U.S. would force it into compromising. In short, if the U.S. escalates, flaunt your military capabilities, but don't escalate in kind. The only "success" that this policy brought for the Iranian regime was the 2015 nuclear deal, which sacrificed Iran's nuclear weapons potential in the hope for sanctions relief that never arrived.

Strategic patience has always been a failure, and this could not be seen any more clearly than after October 7. Iran did next to nothing until its Syrian embassy was attacked, and didn't carry out a serious response until the country was attacked on a large scale in the Twelve-Day War.

Now the Iranian leadership is announcing that the era of strategic patience is over. In a very formal and official sense, this is true. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is not sitting back and doing nothing. It attacked numerous U.S. bases in the region, the infrastructure of its pro-U.S. neighbors and Israel. But if you look at the strategy behind these attacks, really you see more of the same. Although the U.S. has been frustrated in achieving its war aims, it has been able to set the pace of the conflict while Iran's attacks have generally been responsive and not escalatory.

The war has become a showdown over who will capitulate first. Will global oil prices force the U.S. to relieve sanctions and concede the Strait of Hormuz, or will the destruction of Iranian civil/industrial infrastructure force Iran to concede?

It's true that the Iranian military has fought back hard and the U.S. is in a very difficult position and unable to wage a continuous war. However, the U.S. has shown its strategy: bomb hard, formally concede in negotiations, then bomb again—rinse and repeat. After each exchange of fire, the U.S. economy gets some breathing room, while the Iranian economy remains besieged as before.

What would it take to truly drive the U.S. out of the Middle East? A mobilization of the masses in a regional war of national and social liberation. But the active participation of the masses is precisely what the regime's war strategy lacks, because of its long-established tradition of repression, oligarchic parasitism and sectarianism. And while the war is regional, it is limited to where Iran has active and organized allies—you do not see the same kind of mass rallies in the region and around the world in defense of Iran like you saw for Palestine. The only places where this war has threatened the stability of reactionary regimes are in the small island kingdom of Bahrain and, to a much lesser extent, Jordan.

With that said, there have been mass mobilizations inside Iran in support of the war. These are largely led by the hardline Paydari faction of the regime. Its social base and its place in the regime rest on the war profiteers, those whose wealth is connected to the funding of the IRGC. Thus, they are viciously hated by a significant part of the population. At the same time, unlike the reformist conciliators, this faction has effectively mobilized mass anger against U.S. imperialism and the Iranian reformist conciliators. At Ali Khamenei's funeral, they publicly attacked the foreign minister Abbas Araghchi and the Speaker of Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf for signing the Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. A lot of their rhetoric can even sound similar to what the ICL has said on condemning strategic patience and signing the ceasefire agreement with the U.S.

But what is their role? It is to take the existing mass anger against imperialism and channel it back into support for the regime. They go out in the streets, mourn Khamenei, call for solidarity with Lebanon, denounce the Arab monarchies, but then express their support for the Supreme Leader and his decision-making. They're a pressure release valve, and the regime effectively deploys them when it costs nothing, and sidelines them when they want to make a deal.

Their tying of anti-imperialism to steadfast support of the regime is especially toxic, because it pushes the anti-regime sections of society towards more open support for imperialism. The more the Iranian people suffer in this war, and the more the hardliners are seen as incapable of fighting the capitulators, the more this defeatist, pro-imperialist sentiment will grow.

Not only this, but they have no answer to Iran's economic destruction. Abbas Araghchi recently went on a podcast to justify his signing of the ceasefire, claiming that while Iran undermined Trump's goals in the first few weeks of the war, signing the ceasefire earlier could have saved the Mobarakeh steel plant and other infrastructure. Obviously, he is doubling down on his capitulation, but at the same time, the capitulationist leadership of the regime is leaning

Atta Kenare/AFP

Revolution Square, Tehran: Billboard reads, "The Strait of Hormuz Remains Closed."

on a very real and popular sentiment that continuing the war only spells more long-term economic suffering.

Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Palestine

So, what's going on in the broader region? In Lebanon, Iran's closest and historically strongest ally is facing a nadir of support. Hezbollah's support is almost entirely limited to the Shia community, one-third of the population, as well as leftist and nationalist minorities among the other sects. Now 58% of Lebanon's population supports Hezbollah's disarmament. This is because their entire resistance strategy has been tied to their incorporation into the comically corrupt and sectarian Lebanese state, and their massively costly and failed intervention in Syria. When the Lebanese masses took to the streets in 2019, Hezbollah only defended the government and wrote off the protesters as pro-imperialist Western liberals.

This war has shown that Hezbollah's historic strategy has unraveled. Previously, Israel refrained from initiating large attacks on Hezbollah, fearful of their response. After October 7 and the Iran war, this has changed: although Hezbollah still has significant tactical capabilities, this has not deterred Israel from large bombings on Dahiyeh—the Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut. Instead, what deters them is Iran's ballistic missiles. Since Iran signed its ceasefire, Israel has refrained from striking Dahiyeh, but has continued its attacks in the South and provocations. Hezbollah has done nothing to respond to these. Hezbollah's current strategy to fight against disarmament seems primarily to rely on its power centers in the Lebanese state, waiting for a provocation from the government in order to militarily respond. The danger of a sectarian civil war in Lebanon pushed by the U.S. and Israel is real, and Hezbollah has no means to fight against this other than by military means—as their mass support is based on sectarian affiliation.

In Iraq, the picture is even worse. Iran's support base is restricted to layers of the clergy and people connected to the Iran-backed sectarian militias. Iraq has a new prime minister backed by Washington, but also supported by Iran. He has pledged to disarm the pro-Iranian militias, which are not widely popular. Iraq has also been key in alleviating pressure on oil prices by redirecting exports away from the Strait and exporting them through Türkiye to the north. In Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran is widely hated, and Iran's main strategy has been to keep bombing Iranian Kurdish groups based in Iraq into submission.

In Yemen, the picture is a bit different. The Houthis had taken a beating after their face-off with the U.S. and Israel last year, losing their prime minister and half of the cabinet to an Israeli strike. At the beginning of the current Iran war, they did not intervene. But this has changed—they triggered a new confrontation with Saudi Arabia and are going on the offensive against Saudi-backed forces while imposing a blockade on Saudi trade in the Red Sea. No doubt, this is causing stress to the Saudis and the Americans, and speaks to the Houthis' strength and resolve. With that said, the Houthis are not imposing the kind of disruption in the Red Sea that we saw two years ago, and this offensive will not decisively turn the tide in favor of Iran.

In the midst of all this, Palestine has been completely sidelined and forgotten. Israel is taking more land in Gaza and increasing the tempo of bombing, with no response from Hamas. In fact, Hamas is still committed to disarmament and plans to run in the next Palestinian elections with Mohammad Dahlan, a known UAE proxy with close ties to Israel and the U.S. And so far, Israel has been spared any attacks and involvement in the latest round of clashes.

Could the U.S. Lose?

So far, I've given quite a negative picture of the war, and to me the advantage seems to be with the U.S. and Israel. With that said, the potential crises of this war could be quite significant for the U.S. The fact that they had to sign a ceasefire with surface-level positive terms for Iran does demonstrate a level of military and economic exhaustion. It's also not unprecedented for nationalist misleaders to preside over victories; the best case in point is the bourgeois Congress Party in India presiding over India's independence from Britain, due to the sheer weakness of the British Empire.

But I don't think we're in this situation, at least not yet. The U.S. empire is declining—the costs of maintaining its hegemony are increasing with this war. But the resistance to the U.S., as I've demonstrated, is hampered by important weaknesses. Moreover, the U.S. will not simply retreat from the Middle East without fighting with all its capabilities. It's important not to get swept up by headlines and to view this conflict in a broader historical arc. In the long run, an isolated Iran cannot stand up to the combined might of the U.S. and all its allies.

In the shorter term, the U.S. will do everything to make sure Iran is not a threat, either by forcing a regime collapse or buying off a section of the regime. I can also see a situation where the U.S. destroys the Iranian economy enough, such that sanctions relief and Iranian tolls on ships in the Strait of Hormuz won't compensate for what was lost in this war. But beyond that, I will refrain from predictions. More important than predictions is what we as communists fight for right now.

Tasks

The main task for us should be twofold: first, to clearly stand in defense of Iran and for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. There must be an ideological confrontation with the layers of the left that refuse to take this stance. To the Iranian left, we must do the same, and tell them to turn to the working class to advance a strategy for an Iranian victory!

However, we must also be ruthless in exposing the dead-end strategy of the Axis of Resistance, specifically the hard-line faction. We must say to the masses that support them: you want to defeat the U.S. and fight the capitulators? Great! To do that, you need to go against the Islamic Republic and its Supreme Leader! The war profiteering undermines the struggle your leaders claim to want to advance—put the war industries under workers control!

As I've mentioned before, I've limited the scope and depth of this report to focus on the current dynamic of the war, given its importance for the current state of the global class struggle. In the end, the points I've laid out are not a full program—developing this would require a deeper study of the region's history, particularly the left and the working class, and the impact of the liberal period on them. However, I hope to have demonstrated that in this juncture, exposing the failed strategy of the current leadership will be key to deepening our work and our impact. ■

LATIN AMERICA

Reaction & Delusion

Left Voice

Electoral billboard for new Colombian president De La Espriella. Left grasps at straws to downplay right-wing turn in Latin America.

This presentation, edited for publication, was given by comrade Julia Emery at our Ninth International Conference.

Our basic starting point in the ICL, as comrades know, is that the struggles of the oppressed in Latin America must be directed centrally against U.S. imperialism. So, what I want to deal with is the political direction in Latin America and how the overall rightward shift in world politics is being reflected. The basic position I want to defend is that we are seeing a significant shift to the right throughout Latin America, with one country after the next going over to neoliberal, pro-Trump governments. At this point, there are only a few countries like Mexico and Brazil where left-wing governments are holding out that are attempting to balance measures to placate the masses with an ultimately futile perspective of negotiating with the rapacious U.S. imperialists.

This position differs significantly from the worldview of other left groups who argue that the right and left are neck and neck, and who either deny or minimize the fact that the right wing is on a real offensive across the continent.

Factors Driving the Rightward Shift

What are the factors behind this rightward shift in Latin America? The first is obviously the world situation defined by Trump's tearing up of the liberal order. The conflict between the U.S. and China is increasingly dominating world politics, and Latin America is a key terrain where this is playing out. China-Latin America trade grew more than 30-fold in the last 20 years from roughly US$12 billion around 2000 to over $480 billion by 2022. The U.S. remains Latin America's largest overall trading partner, mainly because of its trade with Mexico and Central America, but China has become the largest trading partner for much of South America. While I won't defend everything China does in South America, it is important to be clear on which power oppresses Latin America, and that is the U.S. Although it is increasingly challenged on the world scene, the U.S. has long considered Latin America its backyard and is prioritizing squeezing the region and pressuring its governments to cut their ties with China.

2026 has seen a rapid intensification of U.S. aggression, beginning with the kidnapping of sitting Venezuelan president Maduro in early January and the capitulation of a wing of the Chavista regime. The most sinister development so far is the imminent threat of counterrevolution in Cuba. Under extreme threat of U.S. strangulation, the Cuban government put all its faith in negotiations, leading to the adoption of a package of economic reforms dictated by U.S. imperialism which, if implemented, would overturn collectivized property and re-establish private property, allowing unfettered access to foreign and *gusano* capital. The Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) is under deadly illusions that this will enable them to survive.

The response to our articles from pro-PCC types has been extremely hostile and hysterical, but I haven't seen an intelligent answer to our arguments that the measures proposed will both overturn all the gains they fight to defend and lead to the destruction of the PCC regime itself. This is what the ICL is fighting against with all the means we have as a small organization.

A second factor driving the rightward shift is the failure of the pink tide governments, which were elected in the 2000s following the neoliberal governments of the 1980s and '90s. As Trotsky explained, in the oppressed countries, the national bourgeoisie can rule either by relying on the imperialists against the masses or by leaning on the masses against the imperialists. For a period of time, these pink tide governments were able to lean on the masses and give them what many considered, quite rightly, as real gains, allowing them some breathing room from imperialism.

Juan Karita/AP photos

Mass uprising against Bolivian government (left) was betrayed by COB workers federation leadership. Right: COB's Mario Argollo shaking hands with U.S. lackey president Paz, June 17.

However, because of changes in the world markets and the world situation, an increase in corruption and in particular very high inflation in countries like Argentina and Venezuela, these governments lost the popular support they once enjoyed. While illusions in Chavismo and Evismo, for example, remain, the fact that Maduro's kidnapping and Delcy Rodríguez's betrayal were basically unopposed in Venezuela was definitive proof that the regime had lost the support of the masses.

Another factor driving support for the right is the very real fear of crime and powerful narco gangs throughout Latin America. These hold whole villages and populations hostage, forcing youth into drug gangs and driving mass immigration to the U.S. by families desperate to escape this violence. Even among many who hate U.S. imperialism and neoliberalism, existing Latin American governments are widely seen to be totally ineffective against the narcos, and there are real illusions that the CIA and DEA are more effective in fighting the drug lords. Aside from our elementary opposition to U.S. imperialism, we have yet to tackle this question seriously. However, I did find the framework laid out in the main article of the new Nigerian newspaper of the ISA-R quite useful to approach this question (see "No to U.S. Imperialist War on Nigeria!", *The Anti-Imperialist,* Issue 1, Summer 2026).

Denial of Reality

The picture I'm presenting here goes significantly against the view presented by many other left groups, according to whom the left and right are basically neck and neck in Latin America, and it's a toss-up which way things are going. I'm going to deal with some of the arguments they raise to defend this view.

One is that although right-wing governments are coming to power across Latin America, in many of these elections, like Peru and Colombia, the results were close. In Argentina, many argue that Milei has met with resistance in implementing some of his measures and his absolute number of votes went down in the midterm elections last year. An example is the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS) in Argentina, which many of you know as Left Voice in the U.S. or Révolution Permanente in France. They argue:

> "The point is that the Right is failing to reconfigure the balance of power to the extent it needs to. What we see, instead, is a very rapid erosion of right-wing governments, like José Antonio Kast's in Chile, Javier Milei's in Argentina, and Rodrigo Paz in Bolivia."
>
> —"Beyond 'Trumpification': Latin America's Deepening Organic Crises," *Left Voice* (5 July)

While some of this is true, the outcome of recent elections must be judged from the standpoint of whether the interests of the oppressed are advanced or set back. The victory of right-wing governments with the backing of the Trump administration, even when they do not have overwhelming support, empowers them and their U.S. imperialist masters to carry out catastrophic attacks on the oppressed masses. For example, despite repeated large mobilizations in Argentina, Milei managed to get his basic law through, cutting back many social services like health and education, and most recently passed a labor reform law that fundamentally guts trade-union rights.

Obviously, it's not out of the question that one of these governments could be replaced with a more left-wing alternative. But it's important to look at the overall historical trend. The last 30 years have seen an exceptional period of liberal democracy in much of Latin America, unlike the succession of coups that was more characteristic of earlier periods. But this is not the norm, and it is quite likely that the Latin American bourgeoisies will be compelled to impose their will and, more importantly, that of the U.S. by force in the coming years.

Another approach on the left is to really minimize the defeats that the working class has seen. Some groups, including the PTS/Left Voice, and to some extent, I think, the latest article that the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) wrote on Bolivia, argue that Bolivia was not a defeat because the uprising was not drowned in blood—despite the Paz government's threat to do so. But the way in which the uprising was defeated is even more dangerous: the COB, the historic organization of the Bolivian working class, knifed the peasants and indigenous peoples in the back, creating a poisonous division

that could last a generation. The Paz government remains in power, its emergency powers remain on the books, and it has gained time to regroup, train fascist bands and receive more reinforcements from U.S. imperialism.

One argument raised more recently by the PTS and others is that the popularity of their leader and elected congresswoman in Argentina, Myriam Bregman, shows that the Argentinian population is turning toward Trotskyism and the FIT-U, the electoral coalition of Trotskyists. Now what is the significance of this increase in popularity? I do not think that the working class is turning *en masse* to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

I think what is happening is that Milei has been in power for two and a half years. Those who voted for him hoping for change are seeing these hopes dashed because their living standards are getting worse. Meanwhile, the Peronistas are totally divided, discredited by their previous stint in government, which ended with inflation at over 200%. They have put up no serious opposition to the Milei government, opting instead for social dialogue and maintaining stability. So, by default, support is growing in the polls for an alternative option. But that doesn't mean the Argentinian proletariat's illusions in Peronism have been broken. The real question for the PTS is what they are going to do with that support.

Defend Cuba Against U.S. Imperialism!
¡Defender a Cuba contra el imperialismo yanqui!
No to Cuban CP Market "Reforms"!
STOP Counter-revolution!
¡Defender a Cuba contra el imperialismo
SpartTalk
FIGHT COUNTERREVOLUTION IN CUBA!
Oppose reforms, for a left opposition!
sparttalk.org/2026-cuba-reforms
SPARTACIST
Supplement 30 June 2026
CUBA: HOW TO STOP THE CATASTROPHE
FORGE A LEFT OPPOSITION! DEFEND THE REVOLUTION!
spartacist.org/en/2026-cuba-catastrophe

Workers Vanguard

United-front demonstration in New York, July 17.

The Need for a Revolutionary Pole

Does this bleak picture mean that the masses in Latin America are universally turning to the right? Absolutely not. There are important countertrends and fightbacks, not least the frequent mass mobilizations in Argentina and the recent uprising in Bolivia. However, what is fundamentally hampering these mobilizations is that even when there is a lot of discontent, there is no alternative leadership perceived as viable at this point, as the various non-revolutionary leaderships have shown themselves to be totally bankrupt.

iclfi.org/cuba-pod
Podcast de la Liga Comunista Internacional
por la defensa de la Revolución Cubana
CUBA FRENTE
A LA AMENAZA YANQUI

Why is it important to have a correct understanding of the balance of forces? Because the key task of Trotskyists in Latin America, as elsewhere, is to build a revolutionary force that can unite the masses in the struggle against U.S. imperialism.

If you think that leadership is already there, that it is represented not in a Trotskyist program but in the size of the mobilizations against neoliberalism or in the spontaneous capacity for self-organization of the masses, the task becomes simply to amplify the mobilizations, which is indeed what much of the Argentinian left argues for. But the task of Trotskyists in Latin America is to build a Trotskyist pole capable of leading the masses.

In doing so, we need to struggle against a couple of trends. One is best represented by our own previous attitude to the governments of the pink tide: to treat governments like Chávez's or Morales', or for that matter Claudia Sheinbaum in Mexico, as no different from right-wing neoliberal governments. The problem with this is that you can't address the illusions people have in them, which are a result of real gains the oppressed have achieved.

The other trend is to capitulate to those forces. This is best represented by organizations and forces who argue that what's necessary is to return the likes of Maduro and Morales to power. One argument we heard in Bolivia is that the problem was that Evo Morales' collaborators betrayed him, and what is needed is a return to "real" Evismo. The same argument is heard in Venezuela.

Here I will mention that our total reorientation on the question of permanent revolution and the need to fuse national liberation and anti-imperialist struggle with the fight for socialism is absolutely fundamental and forms the basis on which we've been trying to intervene in Latin America, and also the basis for our ongoing discussions with the POR. ■

AFRICA
Fragmenting

Tony Karumba/AFP

Somalia: National Army soldiers after battle with Al-Shabaab forces, November 2025. Civil war exemplifies Africa's fracturing caused by imperialist plunder.

The following presentation, edited for publication, was given by comrade Jesse at our Ninth International Conference.

To begin with the obvious point, the African continent is vast. There are many different dynamics in the different regions and countries, and even within different regions of single countries. To make things worse, we as a tendency have written almost nothing about most of them. Keeping these caveats in mind, the process of fragmentation which is described in the conference document (see page 12) hits on a fundamental dynamic shaping the continent. One statistic captures the basic issue at the economic level: ***less than 15%*** of all the trade conducted by African countries is with other African countries.

The current political dynamics within many African countries greatly exacerbate this problem. South Africa stands out in this regard: when you have daily pictures of foreign-owned shops being burned in Johannesburg and Durban, it threatens to block and reverse what little progress has been made toward economic integration of the continent. The anti-immigrant pogroms in turn feed into a bigger reactionary spiral: from Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Nigeria, other regimes point to what's happening in South Africa to justify cutting deals with U.S. imperialism.

Pan-Africanism is increasingly discredited among growing sections of the masses, having become identified with the rhetoric of the African Union and former liberation movements that are in power. For decades, they have hypocritically used phrases about African solidarity and unity as a cover for maintaining colonial borders and deepening their countries' subjugation to imperialism. South Africa today shows very starkly how this fuels a chauvinist backlash which threatens to further weaken the masses and strengthen imperialism.

Barriers to Progress

To begin to cut against this, what we have to do is start from the barriers to regional and economic transformation and ties, which means confronting imperialism at every step. First, almost all regional trade is conducted in U.S. dollars. The comrades from the Movement for a Socialist Alternative (FRL-Nigeria) pointed out to us that even the bandits, when they kidnap people, demand their ransoms in U.S. dollars.

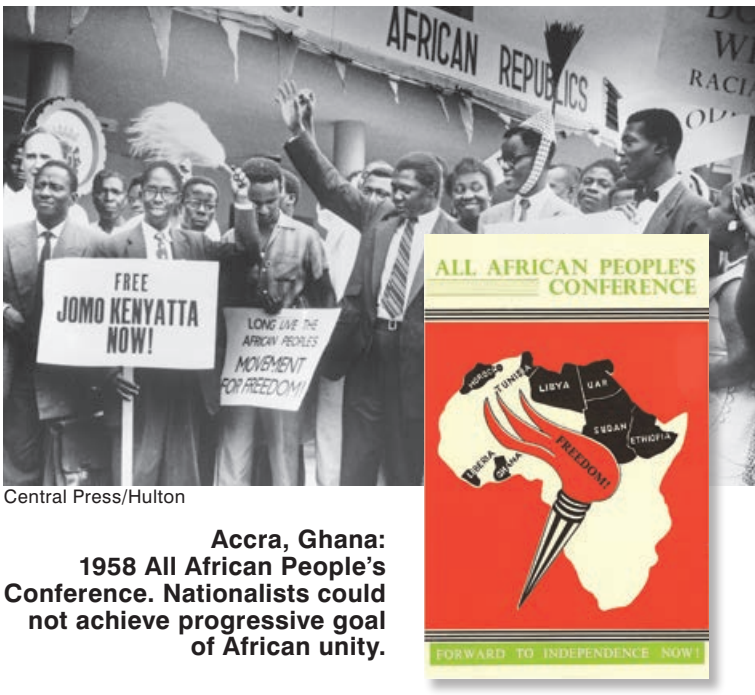
Second, African countries are strangled by debt and corruption, making the maintenance of effective state powers—not to mention public services—increasingly untenable. The result of this is the proliferation of private military contractors such as Erik Prince's mercenaries or the private police forces funded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that are being set up to guard mines in eastern DRC. In a way, Paul Kagame has also turned the Rwandan military into a contractor for the imperialists and foreign companies. This state fragmentation is an absolute barrier to national development and to continental trade.

Third, the infrastructure on the continent still reflects that established by European colonizers during the scramble for Africa in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway connecting landlocked Ethiopia

to the sea was under French control for most of the 20th century. Falling into disrepair, it had become basically useless for trade by the early 2000s, before being replaced by a modern railway that Chinese companies began constructing in 2018.

So, how do we begin to turn this around? Obviously, the hyper-exploited, youthful working class of the continent is the only force that can lead this. But to get anywhere in forging the leadership of the working class needed for that monumental task, we have to start by being honest about the current state of our movement. What I want to emphasize, since I'm speaking to a room filled mainly with Trotskyists, is that our movement is not seen as having anything to offer to the masses of Africa—to put it bluntly.

One of the main reasons for this is that the dominant trend among Trotskyists on the continent is to reject the national liberation and anti-imperialist struggle as a diversion from class struggle. This completely cedes the ground to the nationalists and Stalinists, leaving their treacherous leadership of the most advanced sections of the workers and oppressed unchallenged. I want to address in particular the way Trotskyists have approached the U.S.-China rivalry, because it's very important for understanding the current dynamics of the relationship of forces on the continent.



Central Press/Hulton

Accra, Ghana: 1958 All African People's Conference. Nationalists could not achieve progressive goal of African unity.

U.S.-China Rivalry in Africa

The dominant tendency among Trotskyists and many others is to view current developments through the lens of a "new scramble for Africa" in which China, like the U.S. and Europe before, is engaged in imperialist plunder. They view imperialism as an economic abstraction defined simply by foreign investment. And since China has by far the biggest economic footprint on the continent, and since Chinese companies are prominently visible in almost every country, the conclusion is to denounce China as one of the equally bad imperialists holding back African development. The appeal of this line of reasoning is bolstered by the fact that, in a superficial way, Chinese trade relations with African countries ***do*** in many ways resemble the colonial patterns. For example, the focus on the extraction of raw materials.

However, this whole way of viewing the U.S.-China rivalry in Africa obscures the true dynamics. It undercuts the ability of revolutionaries to compete with those who embrace the Communist Party of China's (CPC) model as the way to liberate Africa. Among these are the Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa or the Communist Party Marxist-Kenya. They both champion the line that the CPC regime is gradually weakening the power of U.S. imperialism, building a multipolar world, and that this shows the way to resolve the huge problems facing Africa. You can try to answer that by saying that China is imperialist, that it's "bad" just like the U.S. But this will only further the isolation and impotence of Trotskyists, and it won't convince anyone because it simply doesn't reflect reality.

If you seriously study American and Chinese policies in Africa and their historical development, you cannot ignore the fundamental differences. On the one hand, the overriding concerns of the U.S. in Africa, besides countering Chinese influence, are extracting minerals and interest payments on debt. Nothing else really matters.

On the other hand, China also has an interest in extraction. But that is not the only concern driving Chinese intervention in Africa. Besides extraction, CPC policy is aimed at trying to build up stable powers on the continent to trade and interact with. It does this primarily through cooperation with African elites, trying to woo them away from Washington. But at the same time, it appeals to the felt needs of the masses for development and an alternative to the Washington consensus, arguing that China's growth model offers a way to industrialize and break free from imperialist subjugation. No serious attempt to make sense of China's role in Africa can ignore this.

To recognize this does not mean hailing CPC policy in Africa as progressive. No, it is reactionary in many ways. Rather, it is to acknowledge that there is a ***profound contradiction*** between the progressive, anti-imperialist aspirations for African development that China's policy appeals to, and the fact that the CPC's bureaucratic, gradualist strategy stands in the way of actually realizing those progressive aspirations. In fact, this strategy plays into the hands of U.S. imperialism, as we can see with some African governments that were previously aligned with Beijing now turning toward Washington (the DRC, for example). Revolutionaries must leverage this contradiction to build a proletarian pole against U.S. imperialism, in competition with the CPC and the nationalists.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia shows concretely how this dynamic plays out. Ethiopia has seen major economic growth since the early 2000s, mainly driven by Chinese investment in manufacturing and industry, as Ethiopia does not have a lot of resources to extract. One of the central projects of the CPC in the region has been to build a free-trade zone centered on Ethiopia and projected to be the largest in Africa. The Addis-Djibouti railway mentioned above is part of this project. So, economic development and regional integration—good things, right?

The problem, however, is that if you look at the methods with which this has been carried out, they do not in any way touch the fundamental obstacles to lasting development. This requires addressing national unification, overcoming ethnic rivalries, and the radical overturn of feudal land relations.

Thomas Mukoya/Reuters

Construction of Nairobi Expressway led by Chinese state company, October 2021.

The Chinese model for economic development in Ethiopia left all these issues completely unresolved. And that is no accident because as China's own history powerfully attests, to fundamentally address these problems requires a ruthless struggle against imperialism and a break with the bourgeois-nationalist forces that conciliate it.

Because none of these underlying issues were addressed, the economic growth stimulated by Chinese investment exacerbated all the social contradictions. In particular, it benefited mainly urban areas, and above all the elites of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)—which, despite being based on an ethnic group representing only 6% of the country's population, has dominated the governing alliance that ruled since the 1990s.

This fueled a backlash among the peasantry, particularly among the Oromo and Amhara peoples, the two largest ethnic groups. Lacking leadership to direct this anger against the imperialists and their lackeys, their legitimate anger over lack of rural development has been channeled against the Tigray minority by the elites around current prime minister Abiy Ahmed, using this to sideline the TPLF and consolidate their own hold on power.

This became a driving force for the 2020-22 war in the Tigray region. The truce that halted this bloody conflict is in constant threat of breaking down because of increasing tension within the Oromo-Amhara elite coalition, as well as shifting regional and global alignments. At the regional level, it has led to an increase in Ethiopia's destabilizing influence in neighboring countries and to strengthening Ethiopia's alignment with the UAE.

A Shift in Imperial Proxies

The alliance with the UAE points to an important shift in the Red Sea/Horn of Africa region, and more broadly on the continent: the increasingly prominent role of the Gulf monarchies (along with other actors like Türkiye). U.S. imperialism has historically never really sought to play a major interventionist role on the African continent, relying on the former colonial powers to take the lead on the ground. An important turning point in this regard came with the Arab Spring and the NATO intervention in Libya, which, by destroying the Libyan state, had a number of farther-reaching consequences throughout the continent, including fueling armed conflicts in the Sahel and other regions.

The consequence it underlined was the increasing ineffectiveness of European military power, prompting the U.S. to turn instead to the Gulf monarchies as a cheaper means of pursuing American interests in the region. This has had far-reaching reactionary consequences, many unintended. For example, the military elites in Sudan became closely tied to Saudi Arabia and the UAE and were drawn into the Saudi-UAE war against the Houthis in Yemen. This was a factor in the U.S. and its vassals pushing the military to oust Omar al-Bashir in 2019 in order to contain the forces demanding civilian rule. But after suppressing the threat to military rule, Gulf monarchies also fed into the split within the military that erupted in civil war since 2023. The UAE and Saudi Arabia back opposing sides in this extremely bloody and reactionary conflict, a rift which has contributed to prolonging the war.

In the midst of all this bloody instability, what has China's policy been? It has basically been completely impotent. At most, the CPC seems to be trying to back the Saudis in this rift, because the Saudi rulers prefer a posture of less overt hostility to China in order to hedge, while remaining completely dependent on the U.S. and falling in line with Israel. This highlights another basic reason why the so-called "Beijing consensus" being offered is bankrupt when it comes to providing a path for African development: the world has fundamentally changed from what existed in the 1990s and 2000s when much of China's industrial rise took place amid a liberal globalist order guaranteed by unrivaled U.S. hegemony.

Tasks of Revolutionaries

To conclude, I want to briefly return to the tasks of charting a revolutionary perspective for Africa. My main takeaway point is that we absolutely must try to leverage the contradiction inherent in China's role in Africa. That is the only way for revolutionaries to actually compete with left-wing nationalists and Stalinists, and win the toilers to a strategy of actually ***fighting*** imperialism.

One key to leveraging this contradiction is the fight for anti-imperialist unity of the African and Chinese proletariats. If you look at the fragmentation of Africa today, there are many ways in which it resembles the century of humiliation that China went through when the country was divided into fiefdoms ruled by competing warlords acting as gendarmes of the colonial powers. This similarity speaks to the shared interest of the Chinese proletariat in opposing the CPC's reactionary policy of conciliating imperialism and siding with the national elites against the African working people. Given that the African continent contains one of the largest concentrations of Chinese workers outside mainland China, revolutionaries in Africa must look for ways to motivate this anti-imperialist unity and connect it with the daily struggles of the masses. This by no means takes the place of a fleshed-out program for the continent, but it's a necessary starting point.■

Where Is the U.S. (Really) Going?

Alex Kormann/Minnesota Star Tribune; insets: Gage Skidmore

AOC, Tucker Carlson or the "general strike"?

This presentation, edited for publication, was given by comrade Erica Jones at our Ninth International Conference.

There are two competing misconceptions about the state of play in the U.S. right now. One view found on social media and in the press of some left groups is that there is a big fightback under way that is turning the tide of Trump reaction. The other view is that the country is lost to the fascists. Both of these get it wrong.

Let's begin with the second view. It is true that the visibility of fascistic groups is increasing. Everybody probably saw the footage of the July 4 assembly of hundreds of Confederate-flag-waving neo-Nazis in Washington, D.C. White nationalism and race terrorism are weapons of the U.S. ruling class to crush unions and the working class, especially in times of crisis. The White House is permeated with white nationalism, from the president's rhetoric to ICE recruitment posters, and it will continue to be wielded to redirect workers' anger away from the ruling class. All of this is, of course, a very dangerous trend. But it has not yet resulted in an organized mass fascist movement that is actively trying to wipe out the workers movement, the left and black and brown people.

The real question is: What is behind this trend? With liberalism no longer the dominant political ideology of the ruling class, Trump's reactionary right-wing populism has been reshaping the political scene in the U.S. Crucially, he has won significant support among sections of the working class. Now, with the economy wobbling and the mess he created for U.S. imperialism with the Iran war, Trump is taking some political hits. Fissures are deepening in MAGA, and Trump is losing support among those who voted for him. Workers can't wrap their minds around why tens of billions of dollars are being spent on a war that is just further driving prices up. The cycle of another "forever war" is repeating itself. Where are workers to turn in response?

Well, far-right populists like Tucker Carlson have stepped into the void of leadership, and fascist Nick Fuentes is becoming increasingly popular among a layer of the working class. They have a real hearing. Just speak to our trade-union comrades who, on a daily basis, have to deal with claims such as "Trump is being blackmailed by Israel" or with the scapegoating of all Jewish people for the crimes of the U.S. ruling class—which does have a small Jewish component but is mostly made up of white Anglo-Saxons.

We can't be certain whether the future will bring a bonapartist state or more fascist attacks or something else. But we can expect the general trend to be a shift further to the right, even if the Democrats win the midterms.

The DSA and many other leftist groups have ensured that, in the eyes of workers, socialism is pretty much synonymous with yesterday's liberal status quo, which drove workers into Trump's arms in the first place. Regrettably,

the betrayals of Mamdani and AOC are what many workers understand as socialism—further dragging its name in the mud and turning workers away from the Marxist left. I'm from New York, and I can tell you that Mamdani does not have the support of the majority of workers there. He has even less support among the many thousands of black and Latino people he is threatening to kick out of public housing. His base is mainly a petty-bourgeois layer, which is justifiably fearful of where the economy is headed and what right-wing reaction has in store for them.

Workers are still, by and large, keeping their heads down and trying to survive as the cost of living soars. This is especially true for black and immigrant workers. They have come under increasing attack by the Trump administration and often are trying to eke out a living on the lowest rungs of society. As such, they feel like they will really lose out if they stick their necks out.

While, on the whole, the working class is staying out of the mix, it's not all doom and gloom either. The working class in the U.S. is not broken. It has waged defensive strikes and struggles when compelled to do so. Most of these struggles have been brought on by aggressive bosses feeling the wind in their sails. Others were brought on by workers trying to claw back what they can as inflation continues to spiral. So far, there hasn't been a decisive defeat of the unions, but there hasn't been a great victory either. In fact, despite the often-heroic determination of the workers, the union leadership has betrayed these struggles, from the NYSNA nurses strike in NYC to the Colorado meatpackers strike and the current ILWU warehouse strike in the Bay Area.

There have been moments when the intensity of Trump's attacks has been so deeply felt that it has provoked a fightback, like in Minneapolis. Tens of thousands, including many workers, were propelled into the streets. There was ferment in the unions. This could have been the spark for a real resistance against Trump. The connection between the defense of the working class and the defense of immigrants was acutely posed. But this spark was extinguished by the trade-union bureaucracy, and the whole thing got channeled back into reliance on the Democrats and appeals to the governor and mayor. It is true that Trump got blowback for how the operation went down in Minneapolis, especially the killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good. That blowback saw Trump take a small, momentary step back to reassess his tactics.

Much of the left, though, pretended things went down very differently. They cheered about how a fake "general strike" crippled Trump. Meanwhile, the Trump administration went on to unleash terror for another month or more in Minneapolis, and workers and activists involved in the protests are still facing charges, like the Minneapolis 15. The view that "Minny shows we are winning" does not fit the reality. Trump adjusted his anti-immigrant game plan and figured out ways to make life even more of a living hell for immigrants—including by targeting workplaces and truckers who rely on Commercial Driver Licenses. Earlier this month, ICE gunned down two immigrants in just one week. While there were small protests over these killings that featured the usual Democratic Party politicians trying to temper anger, they certainly didn't spark anything remotely like the outpouring in Minneapolis. Truth be told, Trump has only gotten away with more ICE terror since the siege of that city.

Portraying these events as big wins begs the question: Why do you need revolutionary leadership at all? The underlying message is to keep on keeping on with the bankrupt union bureaucracy, liberals and Dems.

There is more to the picture. The cascade of cop killings of black people has continued as well, which isn't surprising given the ramping up of state terror. Marx was inspired by Fourier's observation that an indication of the development of a society is the status of women in that society. I think that in the U.S., the same can be said about the status of the black population.

Right now, one-year-olds getting gunned down by cops in the U.S. is just considered the way things are. Death from gross medical neglect is the norm. Racially segregated ghettos, schools and workplaces are everywhere. The Democrats have dropped their posture on social questions, their election campaigns make almost no pretense of defending black people whatsoever, or any other specially oppressed layers for that matter. Another real sign that things have shifted to the right in the U.S. has been the almost complete lack of black struggle. This is the result of demoralization born of the betrayals of the liberals and fear of what they know to be true: they are in the crosshairs of the current reactionary tide.

Having painted this picture of what is happening in the U.S., which honestly isn't pretty and will only get worse, I want to conclude by answering the question: What's our plan as revolutionary Marxists?

In short, a central responsibility in this period is defending oppressed communities against both right-wing attacks and the liberals who have abandoned them. We must find ways to fuse the struggles of the specially oppressed with the struggles of the working class. Our task is to develop an independent revolutionary pole anchored in the working class itself—one capable of resisting economic austerity, bridging racial divisions that poison the unity of the class, and exposing both the reactionary right and the liberal establishment as different political expressions of the same parasitic imperialist order. Related to this, our aim is to fight to regroup revolutionary elements around a clear goal: breaking the left from liberalism and rooting it in the working class.■

JUST BREAK ALREADY
DSA Must
• Break with the Dems!
• Expel All Dem Electeds!
Gimme a Break!
The official podcast of the Just Break Already caucus in the Democratic Socialists of America

Rise and Fall of Chavismo…

(continued from page 60)

shaped his program as well. Just like you'll see a portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture in many Haitian households, the same goes for Bolívar portraits posted up in the homes of Venezuelans, sometimes with portraits of Chávez right next to them.

When looking at Latin American history, many paint the wars of independence in the 1800s as total victories, where nations broke free from Spain and became completely sovereign. But when we look critically, these independence struggles were deeply flawed, deformed and incomplete. Bolívar's was no different. This fight for national liberation was progressive, but it was organized by a reactionary class who, although they led the rebellion against Spain, were never actually capable of carrying out the progressive democratic tasks needed to build a truly free and equal society. Bolívar's grand dream of a unified, democratic Latin America didn't fail because he didn't fight hard enough or because he lacked military genius. The revolution failed and Gran Colombia shattered because both were tied to wealthy landowners whose economic interests ran completely against the needs of the oppressed masses and the struggle for genuine national liberation.

As mentioned before, the leaders of the revolution weren't slaves or the toiling poor—people who actually made up a good portion of the army. They were the Criollo elite: Spanish-descended, white, wealthy landowners who made their fortunes by exploiting enslaved Africans, the Indigenous and mixed-race peasants. These elites hated Spain and wanted freedom, but they only wanted emancipation so they could trade globally on their own terms and have complete control over their land. The Criollo class was absolutely terrified of the people they oppressed. With the bloody Haitian Revolution fresh in their minds, the wealthy leaders refused to give the poor majority real power.

One of Bolívar's reforms was to give land to his poor rank-and-file soldiers, but this was fought against ruthlessly by the Criollo class. Instead of breaking up the massive colonial estates (latifundia) and giving them to the peasants, the war's generals (many of whom came from the Criollo class) kept the best land for themselves and left the large landlord estates completely intact. The poor remained landless, forced to stay on land owned by the wealthy elite while working under brutal conditions just to survive. When it comes to the land question, you cannot have true liberation when a handful of people own all the land while everyone else starves.

The new laws and constitution Bolívar fought for technically abolished the old colonial caste system, but daily life told a different story. The constitution barred anyone who didn't own property from voting. This automatically excluded the vast majority of the black, Indigenous and mixed-race population from having any say in their own country.

The Criollos also did everything they could to prevent or at least slow down the abolition of slavery. Bolívar, who condemned slavery, said it is "madness that a revolution for liberty should try to maintain slavery." But he would conciliate the Criollo slaveowners at the Congress of Angostura, decreeing a gradual abolition of slavery. As a result, this barbaric institution remained intact until 1854.

Juan Barreto/AFP

Commemoration of Simón Bolívar, hero of the independence struggle, July 2010.

Bolívar knew that for Latin America to survive against powerful foreign empires, it needed to be one massive, unified country: Gran Colombia. But the local elites only cared about protecting their own small regional markets and businesses. Infighting among the Criollo elites broke Gran Colombia apart into small, weak nations. This set up a cycle of poverty, instability and imperialist intervention across Latin America.

Although the Spanish were defeated, nothing really changed for the oppressed masses in the region. The Criollo aristocracy simply sat on the old Spanish thrones, keeping the money, the land and the power for themselves. The fragmentation of Gran Colombia left the most important democratic tasks of the revolution unfinished: the land question, the unification of the continent and the destruction of the racist class system. This fracturing and weakness left the region vulnerable first to British and then to American colonizers, who moved in to take control of the economy. Nearly two centuries later, Hugo Chávez stepped right into this historical trap. Using Bolívar's name to win over the masses, Chávez tied them and his "revolution" to a left-wing military caste while trying to fix a broken capitalist system, instead of putting the working class and the oppressed at the head of the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist movement.

2. Military Man/Champion

The U.S. built itself into an imperialist force in Latin America and the Caribbean through the Spanish-American War, the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary. The U.S. had a particular interest in Venezuela because the country was rich in resources like oil. To keep the country

under their domination, the imperialists installed one dictator after another until dictatorships were no longer politically advantageous to them.

With Cuban nationalists and the masses trying to oust Batista in Cuba in the 1950s, the imperialists could not afford a similar situation in Venezuela. They needed to set up some sort of "democratic institutions" to counter any sentiment for a liberation struggle. So, the country's ruling parties worked with the U.S. to get rid of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, bringing in democracy under the Punto Fijo Pact. But what was presented as democracy for the masses was really just a corrupt power-sharing scheme between Venezuela's three main parties. Whether under a dictatorship or Puntofijismo, the Venezuelan working class and oppressed were excluded from the political life of the country, and the left was driven underground. At the same time, the imperialists sank their teeth deeper into Venezuela, and the oligarchs grew richer off the backs of the masses.

Smith Archives

Leading signatories of the Punto Fijo Pact (left). The pact gave a democratic facade to U.S. neocolonial domination of Venezuela.

Louis Dalrymple

EXPANSION!
The western patrol's long stretch.

This long history of oppression and exclusion finally bubbled up in the 1989 Caracazo. By this point, Puntofijismo had reached its limits as President Carlos Andrés Pérez, who had ruled at the height of the pact in the 1970s, was re-elected by masses hoping for some relief from crushing impoverishment. After decades of using the working class' pockets to compensate big oil and the imperialists, when Pérez imposed austerity measures in exchange for IMF loans, the oppressed had had enough. Venezuela exploded in the Caracazo as a massive, spontaneous uprising of the working class and urban poor swept across the country.

The thing is that Puntofijismo had choked off any independent working-class movement, as many union leaders attached the working class to the ruling parties. Then you had the left that had crumbled because it had no real strategy for fighting the traditional parties and the oligarchs. The Venezuelan working class and oppressed masses had no one to turn to. There was no mass, independent revolutionary party to guide the explosive energy of the Caracazo and direct it against the ruling class and toward the seizure of state power. And with no leadership to guide it, the traditional capitalist parties brutally crushed the revolt, killing thousands.

At the time of the Caracazo, Hugo Chávez and his collaborators knew they needed to fight the ruling class and were planning to stage a takeover. But they were taken by surprise by the mass uprising and remained helpless in changing the course of events. This experience and the severe repression of the masses radicalized Chávez and his group, convincing them to go ahead with their coup plans.

Through his Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200, Chávez led a bloody but unsuccessful coup against the unpopular government of President Pérez in 1992. Though the military uprising was brutally put down, Chávez was allowed to make a brief televised surrender speech. By taking sole responsibility for the failed coup and asking his collaborators to stand down "por ahora" (for now), Chávez became a hero to the working class and oppressed masses, who felt abandoned by the political establishment.

But Chávez was not done. During his time in prison, he recognized the potential for a more "democratic" path to power, and once he was out, he founded the Fifth Republic Movement. His movement made demands that spoke to the hearts and minds of the masses. Along with pledging to rewrite the constitution, establish a participatory government and redistribute the country's immense oil wealth, Chávez swore to fight corruption, spoke out fiercely against U.S. imperialism and invoked Bolívar's dream of a united Latin America.

It's not unusual in Latin America for military strongmen to come to power. When the capitalist class is too weak or discredited to rule effectively and the working class is not yet organized enough to take power, the state apparatus (specifically the military) can elevate a leader who appears to stand above classes. In this case, it was a left-wing military officer who was pushed forward. Speaking to the widespread anger at political corruption and a collapsing neoliberal economy, Chávez transitioned from a military officer into a champion of Venezuela's working class and urban poor. He campaigned as an outsider and won the 1998 presidential election in a landslide, taking office in 1999 and officially

filling the political vacuum left by a decaying establishment.

So, the failed coup and the 1998 election propelled Chávez's rise to power, but what solidified him as a defender of the oppressed was Plan Bolívar 2000 and the "Misiones." Once in office, Chávez used the military to directly assist marginalized communities. Through programs like Plan Bolívar 2000, he deployed soldiers to build low-income housing, repair schools and deliver affordable food to the barrios. This bridged the gap between the armed forces and the people, firmly cementing his status as a defender of the poor. He promised that his "Bolivarian Revolution" would finally finish what Bolívar had started. Using billions of dollars from nationalized oil revenues, Chávez funded massive social programs for health, education and food, giving the poor their first real taste of political and social dignity.

Chávez continued to nationalize key industries and enact reforms that benefited the working class and oppressed masses. Chávez's reforms, like his Bolivarian program, were moderate—but they still made the oligarchs hysterical. This was because the masses mobilized to push Chávez and his reforms forward, and also to defend them when they came under attack from the oligarchs and the imperialists. Instead of harnessing the revolutionary energy of the working class and oppressed to finally smash the oligarchs and imperialists, Chávez chose to conciliate them. Each act of conciliation signaled weakness on Chávez's part, which emboldened the right wing and Washington to continue their attacks.

Jose Angel Murillo/Alamy

Caracazo: Brutally repressed popular uprising against neoliberal president Andrés Pérez, February 1989.

3. Holding Back

There have been many instances of Chávez conciliating the opposition. The most notable came in the aftermath of the April 2002 coup. The 2002 right-wing coup attempt in Venezuela is considered to be the moment the country's oppressed masses woke up to their own historical agency. A coalition of business elites, corrupt labor bureaucrats and military generals, backed by U.S. imperialism, kidnapped Chávez and installed Pedro Carmona as dictator. In response, hundreds of thousands of workers, peasants and the urban poor poured out from the barrios, surrounded Miraflores Palace and forced the coup plotters to flee. The masses moved with such force that the oligarchs and the imperialists had no choice but to put Chávez back in office. This spontaneous and heroic uprising could have been the beginning of a true transformation of Venezuelan society. The masses were ready, standing up as an independent political force willing to fight the capitalist system and the imperialists alike.

But rather than seizing this revolutionary opening to defeat the bourgeoisie and beat back Washington, Chávez actively held back the insurrectionary momentum of the masses. Once he was back in the presidential palace, Chávez did not call for the arming of the workers or the expropriation of the property owned by the coup plotters. Instead, he held up a crucifix and preached national reconciliation. He is famously quoted as saying, "The revolution does not see the opposition as the enemy; we see them as compatriots." With this, Chávez demobilized the masses, sending them peacefully back to their homes.

Ali Gomez/AP

Chávez defiant after his failed coup, 4 February 1992.

Many will disagree with what I just said, but look at what happened next. In the wake of the failed coup, the Venezuelan working class expected revolutionary justice against the oligarchs who had just kidnapped their leader and thrown the country into chaos. Instead, Chávez relied on the bourgeois court system to administer justice. But the courts ruled that there was no coup and cleared all the plotters of any charges. Chávez criminally channeled the raw, combative energy away from being unleashed against the oppressors and back within the bounds of what was safe for capitalism. This would have deep consequences.

His conciliation only emboldened the ruling class. The oligarchs and the imperialists continued their offensive through the December 2002 bosses' lockout and oil industry sabotage. Workers responded aggressively by staging spontaneous factory occupations. The masses wanted to arm themselves to defend the Bolivarian Revolution, but Chávez prevented the formation of independent workers militias. Instead, he mobilized the military, maintaining it as the only force capable of keeping order and fighting the opposition. This ensured that the working class remained disarmed and completely dependent on the state.

The response of the working class and urban poor to the 2002 coup provided an opportunity to build workers tribunals and soviets, and even to transform the Bolivarian Circles into these councils. Chávez, though, made the conscious decision to maintain capitalism. He consistently went out of his way to reform

AVN

Masses rally to defense of Chávez, defeating U.S.-backed coup, April 2002.

the system from above instead of allowing the masses to dismantle it from below. That's because guiding the working class to power would have threatened his position as the military strongman in Miraflores Palace.

Even Chávez's reforms, which did alleviate the pressure of impoverishment on the working masses, still respected private property relations. Under his constitution, the banks, the land and the major manufacturing infrastructure were left in private hands, and the state itself remained a bourgeois state. Chávez never intended to change this system. Just look at what he did when workers took control of key sections of the oil industry. Instead of dismantling the capitalist state and giving real democratic control to the workers through factory committees, he centralized power within the military and his own political inner circle. This created a new class of wealthy bureaucrats, often called the boli-bourgeoisie. Private property remained protected, and the entire country stayed dangerously dependent on selling oil to global capitalist markets.

4. Tasks

So, you have a lot of craziness going on in Venezuela during the Chávez years, with all sections of society taking part in political life. Or at least having something to say about the situation in the country. The left around the world had some sort of analysis of Chávez, but no group laid out what the real tasks were. So, what were the tasks of revolutionaries during this time? The primary task during the "Bolivarian Revolution" was to participate actively in the mass movement in order to expose the contradictions and limitations of Chávez's bourgeois-nationalist program—not to follow it blindly or sit on the sidelines. Only by actually taking part in the struggle and getting your hands dirty could revolutionaries win the trust of the working class and oppressed masses. Part of the fight would have been to use their concrete, day-to-day struggles to expose Chávez's reformist program. Chavismo could never bring true national liberation to Venezuela because it sought to alleviate the daily hardships of the masses within a capitalist framework rather than smashing the root cause of their oppression.

Within the movement, revolutionaries should have constantly pushed beyond Chávez's rhetoric, demanding the total expropriation of capitalist private property and the arming of the working class. Raising these demands would have backed the Chavista regime into a corner, exposing how it was consolidating power in the hands of the military instead of the working class and urban poor. This would have been tied to calling for the creation of independent workers and peasants councils, showing the masses that genuine socialism could not be delivered from above by a leader looking to conciliate the oppressors. It had to be built from below through independent organs of working-class power. This would not have been hard to argue, either, as the masses were constantly set in motion to defend the "Bolivarian Revolution" and Chávez from the ongoing attacks of the ruling class and the imperialists.

The point was to use these demands to expose the increasing corruption and bureaucratism that started to hollow out the Bolivarian government. But how did the hollowing out happen? The problem is Chávez never built the Bolivarian movement on an anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist program, and his party and government were filled with people who wanted to maintain the status quo. Chávez himself was only pushed in that direction by the masses, who wanted to free themselves from centuries of colonial domination. Because he had no real strategy for defeating the opposition, he constantly performed a balancing act: leaning on the masses and coming out strongly against the imperialists in words, but conciliating the opposition in deeds by never touching private property. This gradually disorganized and demoralized the Chavista base.

To break the masses away from bourgeois-nationalist reformism and build an independent vanguard party, it was necessary to have an orientation toward Chávez's Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). The PSUV was marketed as an organization meant to bring the fragmented left and other revolutionary elements together and advance the Bolivarian movement. I know we've been talking about revolutionary regroupment—this was not it. The PSUV was a top-down, multi-class coalition designed to bureaucratically control the revolutionary energy of the working class. Fighting to break it from within was necessary as many had joined because they saw it and Chávez as the main force fighting imperialist oppression. Being in the movement, participating critically, and fighting relentlessly for a genuine anti-imperialist path would have broken the masses from Chávez's grip. But none of the left groups that joined the PSUV did this. Many claimed they were entering to break the masses from Chavismo, but all liquidated into the party and remained there until they were bureaucratically expelled by Maduro.

5. Two Trends

The strategy of entering the movement to expose the limits of bourgeois nationalism went directly up against the two main political trends in the Marxist movement around Chavismo. These two trends were (and still are) sectarianism and opportunism. Both were wrong because they failed to connect revolutionary strategy with the actual political and

social reality of the working class and oppressed masses. Here is how these strategies clashed and why they failed.

Sectarian groups looked at Hugo Chávez, saw that he was not a pure Marxist and refused to have anything to do with his movement. They stood on the sidelines, shouted slogans and denounced Chávez and his followers from afar. We fell into this trend. We simply called Chávez a bourgeois politician and said his movement and neoliberalism were two sides of the same coin. This is a damaging line to have. Bringing this line to the Venezuelan masses, who saw Chávez pushing back against imperialism and making their lives more bearable, could only repel them from us. That's if they didn't physically hand our ass to us.

It's true that Chávez was a bourgeois nationalist and not a Marxist. But we denounced him, kept our hands clean and offered nothing to the masses, who were being led down the wrong road. This wrong road contributed to the degraded position they find themselves in today, further under the boot of imperialism. Our sectarianism did nothing but isolate us from the very people we needed to lead and organize in an anti-imperialist movement. But we had no desire to be in the movement or find out what the masses were thinking. During the Chávez years, we never seriously attempted to find out for ourselves what life was like for the masses—what they thought and what they felt. Millions of working-class people passionately supported Chávez. To them, he was the extension of Bolívar. Chávez was their defender, fighter and leader. Communists standing on the outside of the movement throwing insults would only make the masses see Chávez as the true socialist. This should make it clear why you cannot win the trust of workers or convince them of better ideas if you refuse to fight alongside them in their day-to-day struggles.

The opportunist trend, represented by the likes of Alan Woods of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT)—now called the Revolutionary Communist International—completely liquidated itself into Chávez's movement. To maintain favor with the leadership and remain popular with the masses, they uncritically joined the PSUV. Woods tried to be slick by saying, "The Bolivarian Revolution cannot succeed if it remains within the limits of capitalism" (*The Venezuelan Revolution: A Marxist Perspective* [2024]). Unlike the sectarians, who wanted nothing to do with the Chavistas because they were bourgeois, Woods correctly understood that Marxists needed to actively intervene in that movement and that it needed to be taken outside the confines of capitalism. But the basis of the IMT's intervention was to push Chávez far enough to the left that he would be the one to complete the Bolivarian Revolution and expropriate the bourgeoisie. The IMT did not see the working class and oppressed as the force that would carry the Bolivarian Revolution forward by breaking from the leadership of Chávez. So, their whole perspective was to push Chávez to the left instead of challenging him for leadership.

Opportunism is, and always will be, a betrayal of the working class and oppressed. By hiding the truth to avoid making waves, groups like the IMT helped spread the illusion that Chávez could achieve socialism. When Chávez's bureaucratic state eventually restricted workers' strikes or protected private property, the opportunists were trapped. They were unable to defend the working class and oppressed masses because they had tied themselves to the Chavista regime. Alan Woods has long since abandoned his support for the Bolivarian regime, but many opportunists haven't. They need to understand that if they truly want to change the course of events, they can no longer abandon revolutionary Marxism in order to remain in the good graces of a "Chavista" regime that is now working as closely as possible with the imperialists.

Reuters

President Maduro, successor to the Chavista Bolivarian Revolution, January 2017.

It's very important for communists to recognize and understand these two trends so that we don't fall into either of these fatal traps. It's also necessary to expose both trends to the masses while providing a path that will bring true national liberation. I'm hoping this presentation can do just that: provide the Venezuelan masses with an explanation of how they got here and how the Chavista years did them no favors in the struggle against the domestic ruling class and the imperialists. That isn't to say we will undo all the damage we helped contribute to over the last 27 years, but it should at least be a start. It is with this new line, firmly grounded in permanent revolution, that we can stand in sharp contrast to both extremes of sectarianism and opportunism. We can no longer remain isolated from the Venezuelan masses and their living struggle. We have to understand that if we want not only a hearing but also the trust of the masses, we need to be there in the dirt and the mud of their day-to-day struggles. We need to stand side by side with them as all hell breaks loose, showing that another way is possible.

We can see that Hugo Chávez didn't actually finish Simón Bolívar's revolution; he simply managed the ongoing and recurring crises of Venezuelan society within the limits of capitalism. Bolívar's tragedy was that he led the Criollo class that was fundamentally incapable of bringing true equality and unity to the continent. Chávez's tragedy was that he used anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist rhetoric and leaned on the revolutionary energy of the masses only to reform the capitalist system. If there's one lesson to learn from the last 225 years of Venezuela's history, it's that the unfinished democratic tasks cannot be solved by left-wing military populism or bourgeois nationalism. These tasks can only be accomplished by a leadership that seeks to unite the working class and oppressed masses around an anti-imperialist program in order to create a genuine democratic, socialist federation

of Latin America. The wealthy elite and privileged military caste can never resolve these historic injustices. Only the working class can do that by taking power and building a socialist society.

6. Now

So what do we do now? After years of holding back the revolutionary aspirations of the masses while the imperialists destabilized the country, the Chavista regime has completely rotted out. Both Chávez and Maduro have responsibility for this. And after Maduro continued to undermine the aspirations of the masses, the masses did not come out to defend him like they did for Chávez in 2002. The left has barely been able to mobilize in defense of Venezuela and many haven't even called for Maduro's release. From the moment of Maduro's abduction, we in the ICL have called on the left and working class to come out and reject the imperialists' attacks. We have written articles, produced podcasts and initiated united fronts to defend Maduro and Venezuela. Let's take it a step forward.

Delcy Rodríguez came to power after Maduro's kidnapping and she has just begun selling the country off to Washington. At first, she played a good game. During her inauguration, she took her oath and then proclaimed that Maduro was the rightful president of Venezuela. Rodríguez initially seemed hard against imperialism only to roll over quick, making deals to open oil fields to the U.S. while stopping all oil shipments to Cuba.

Nothing is going well for the working and oppressed masses of Venezuela. Rodríguez opening up the country to U.S. intervention will only make things worse and turn the country into a neocolony. Now, with Caracas in shambles after two devastating earthquakes, the lives of the masses will be more unstable. The capital itself doesn't have enough response teams to save the thousands trapped underneath the rubble. This is the result of continued imperialist sanctions that have eaten away at Venezuelan infrastructure. Many are dying as buildings continue to collapse. What's Rodríguez doing? She continues to make deals with the U.S. in exchange for aid. (See "Venezuela and Colombia: Same Disaster, Same Enemy," *Spartacist*, 24 August.)

This aid will only come at the cost of ensnaring the country and its masses tighter in the choking grip of American imperialism. The Venezuelan working class and oppressed need to fight, but the struggle cannot be under the same Chavista program of the last 27 years that has completely undermined their revolutionary strength. The masses must organize together and fight back against Rodríguez and the colonial vultures in Washington, placing the working class at the head of the movement. This movement needs to be based on an anti-imperialist strategy that also crushes the oligarchs and the conciliators in the Chavista regime. An anti-imperialist fight that harnesses the revolutionary energy of the masses is not only about saving Venezuela but also the rest of Latin America, where a wave of right-wing reaction is sweeping the continent.

Workers Vanguard

Spartacists join protesters demanding freedom for kidnapped president outside court hearing, New York, March 26.

So let's correct our approach to Chavismo. Go to Venezuela. Find out what the masses want and think in order to win their hearts and minds. Let them know what we have to say and work with the masses and those on the left who truly want to build a revolutionary anti-imperialist united front.

Down with Delcy Rodríguez!
Down with U.S. imperialism!
Free Maduro!
For a Free and Red Venezuela and Latin America!

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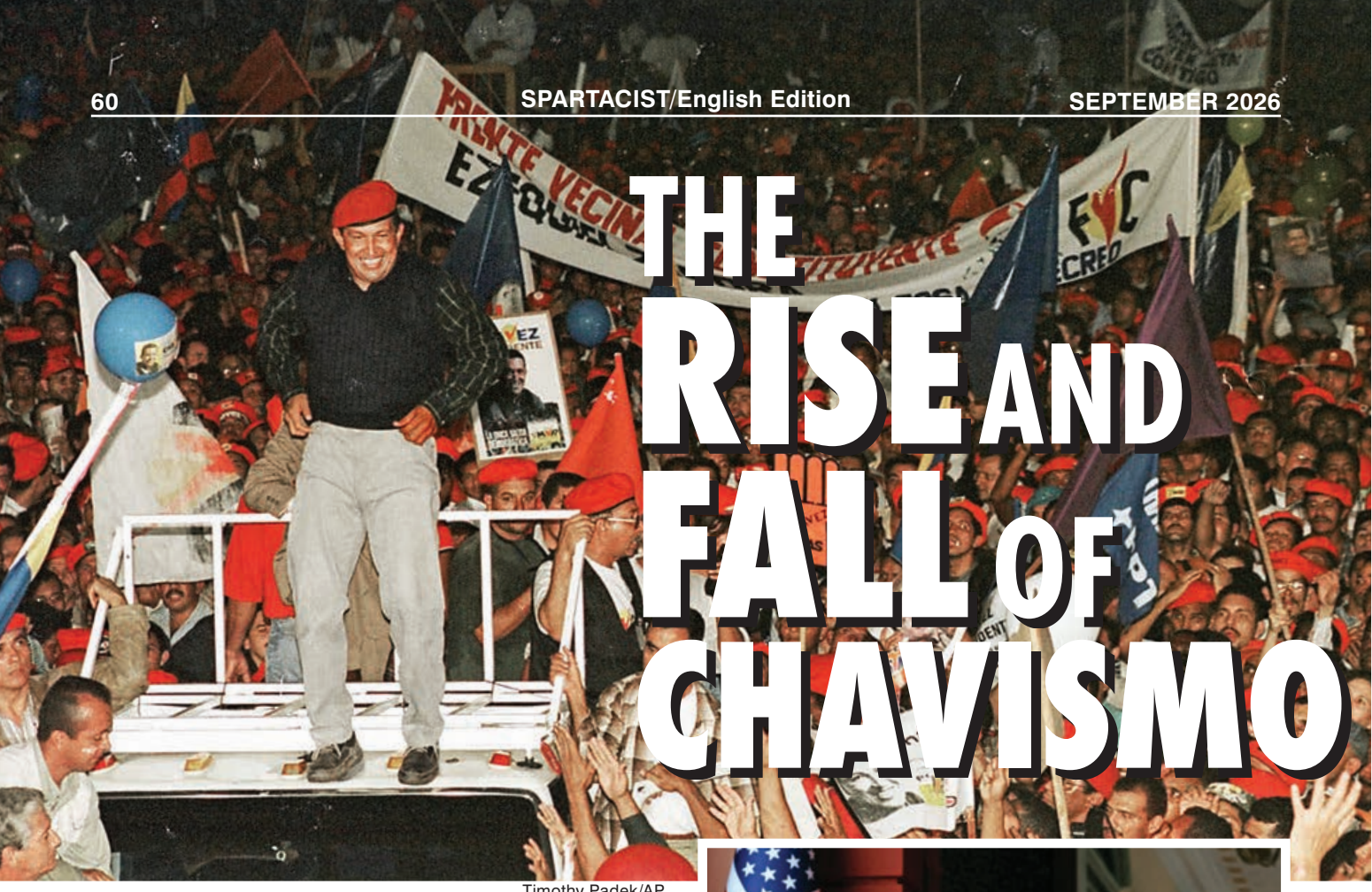
THE RISE AND FALL OF CHAVISMO



Timothy Padek/AP

December 1998: Hugo Chávez on the brink of power cheered by thousands of supporters. March 2026: Interim president Rodríguez selling out Venezuela to the U.S.

Leonardo Fernandez Viloria/Reuters

BY MARIA PALACIO

The following presentation was given at the ICL's Ninth International Conference.

Now that U.S. imperialism has increased its attacks on Latin America, starting the new year by abducting Nicolás Maduro and his wife, we have to take a look at how Venezuela got to its current position. But we can't answer this without changing our approach toward Chavismo and the "Bolivarian Revolution." This is necessary not only because of the dire situation in Venezuela right now, but also because the U.S. invasion of the country has created a devastating wave that reaches Cuba, Colombia, Puerto Rico and the rest of Latin America. The invasion of Venezuela has also paved the way for the attacks on Iran and other parts of the world.

The masses in Venezuela and Latin America are looking for a way out, but many still see Chávez as the model for countering imperialism. Most of us here know that Chavismo is not the way forward, but how do we convince the masses of that? We also need to reach those who once supported Chavismo but became demoralized by this dead-end strategy. How do we show them that there is a path to a genuine anti-imperialist movement that can crush both the imperialist rulers and the oligarchs? To come up with the answer, we need to look at the unfinished democratic tasks of Venezuela's war of independence, how Chávez became the champion of the masses, how he restricted their revolutionary energy, what the task of revolutionaries should have been during the Chávez years, and what the different trends on the left said and did.

1. Bolívar

I wanted to start the presentation off with Simón Bolívar and the war for independence because it was this figure and this struggle that shaped Chávez as a political leader and

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